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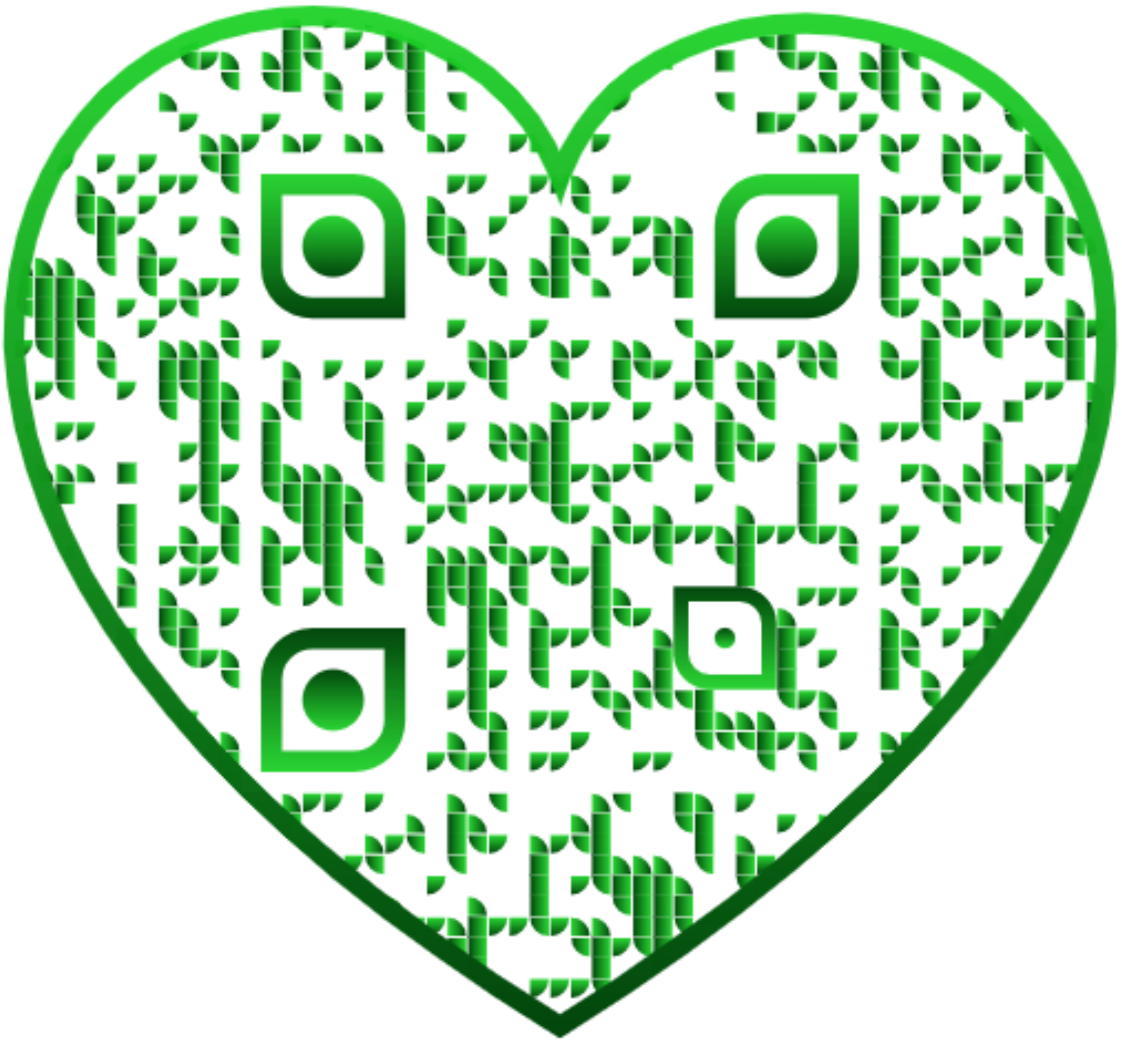

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Welcome...

Back in the days when I taught guitar as my job, January was always my busiest time. I think it's a mixture of beginners, guitarists keen to rock new gear received from Father Christmas and long-term players with New Year's resolutions to become happier with their playing. And if those last two sound anything like you, well, you'll get plenty out of this issue!

First things first, we have a new, exclusive interview with one of the hottest virtuosos around today: Matteo Mancuso. The prodigiously talented Italian talks us through the finer points of his fingerstyle technique, gives us his tips for transforming pentatonic ideas and going from rock to jazz, and he outlines how he likes his gear set up. Along similar lines, we get inside the minds of modern acoustic wizard Jon Gomm, Halestorm's Lzzy Hale, plus former KISS icon and inspiration to countless players, Ace Frehley.

Hopefully you'll be feeling inspired by the insight and wisdom these stars have to offer, because what follows is a technique workout designed to help you improve your playing across a 30-day practice plan. Of course, you don't have to follow the plan! It's fluid, so feel free to pick and choose the exercises that suit your goals the best.

Finally, elsewhere you'll find reviews of Fender's Mike McCready Strat and the Guild Polara Kim Thayil, learn songs by Iron Maiden and Goo Goo Dolls, read interviews with Neck Deep and Tesseract, plus much more!

We've had a blast putting the issue together, so I hope you enjoy it, too!

Chris Bird Editor

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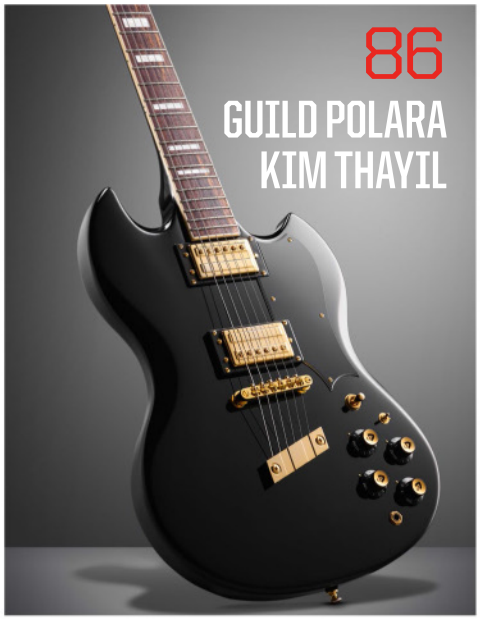

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Words Stuart Williams
Photography Olly Curtis

GOLDIEROCKS

St. Vincent's latest Sterling signature model is set to stun

We love Sterling By Music Man's guitar designs here at TG, and now St. Vincent's Annie Clarke has taken the retro, Jetsons-style design of her signature model and overhauled it. First up is that Cashmere finish (the 'Goldie' also comes in Velveteen). Previously, the Sterling version of the St. Vincent model was available in an HH configuration, then later as a three-pickup model. But here, we see it brought closer to the full-fat Music Man version – launched in 2021 – with a trio of gold foil mini-humbuckers.

The body is nyatoh, while the neck is made from roasted maple. It's finished off with a 25.5" scale, 12"-radius rosewood fingerboard with custom St. Vincent inlays and 22 frets. At the headstock end, we get a reversed 4/2 locking tuner arrangement, along with a colour-matched face. Meanwhile at the body end, the strings are terminated by a thru-body, vintage-style vibrato.

Priced at a reasonable £1,099, we'll be putting the Goldie through its paces next month!

UP CLOSE

Epic Foil

Gold foil mini-humbuckers have been a bit of a trend this year. Here, you get three of them and a five-way switch.

Roast Boast

The neck is roasted maple, known for its reliable stability, and it's capped with a rosewood fingerboard.

Cashmere

No goats were harmed, nor required for this luxurious-looking gold finish, but the Goldie also comes in the burgundy-ish Velveteen.

SCENE

YOUR NEWS IN GUITARS

BACK IN BLACK
Himalayas (from left): James Goulbourn (drums), Mike Griffiths (lead guitar), Louis Heaps (bass), Joe Williams (vocals/guitars)

TRACK

"I LIKE REALLY FILTHY, NASTY GUITAR TONES!"

FOR THEIR NOISY NEW SINGLE, WELSH BAND **HIMALAYAS** HAD A LITTLE HELP FROM AC/DC...

When Cardiff-based rockers Himalayas received an "unexpected gift" in the form of lyrics penned especially for them by AC/DC singer Brian Johnson, they knew they'd have to bring their A-game to do it justice. Guitarist Mike Griffiths talks us through new single *V.O.V.*

How did this collaboration with Brian Johnson come about?
Our manager is the monitor mixer for AC/DC. He played Brian Johnson a few of our tracks and he loved them. He sent over some lyrics and said: 'I really like what you do. See what you can do with this'. We got that just before we did our first album and we put it on the backburner a little bit, which we're all glad about because – after doing the album – we got a lot better at what we do. This is the third incarnation. We weren't completely happy the first couple of times, but it feels like we've managed to get it to a really good place.

What was it like writing to his lyrics?
We had to find a way of fitting everything in with what we do. That's partly why it took a few takes to get it right. It's very difficult, I find, having lyrics and then writing around that. We usually have a bit of both going on as the song develops. You need to have an immense amount of respect for where it's coming from. It adds an extra element of importance and we needed to get it right. You don't mess something like that up!

How would you describe your guitar sound in Himalayas?
It's quite wild a lot of the time. With the boys, there's a lot of low end going on, so I've got a lot of space to cover. I like really filthy, nasty guitar tones, so that's what I normally go for.

What's your guitar of choice?
I've got an Epiphone Casino, which I absolutely love and it's a really nice 'house' guitar to sit around and jam on. But it's P-90s on a hollowbody, so as soon as I put a couple of pedals on it, it just makes noise. For live, I've got a Telecaster Thinline that I've had for five or six years, and that's been a proper workhorse. I also use an Epiphone Les Paul Custom and I love playing that, but it's not doing my back any favours!

What are you plugging into for those glitchy fuzz tones?
I was using an Ibanez Overdrive for quite a few years. There's something really horrible about it and I loved that. I've always gone for a POG2 and that's on constantly. That helped cut through with the Ibanez, but I got a Warp Drive from Stone Deaf last year and that pedal's just incredible. You can EQ it and the gate is really solid. As much as I like noisy feedback, it's always nice to be able to rein it in as quickly as possible, so that helps. I use a Boss Tera Echo for making the sound a bit wider and I recently got a DigiTech Whammy that I can't stop playing with – which is exactly what I feared would happen!

Ellie Rogers

Photo Andrew Cooper

Fender
HIMALAYAS

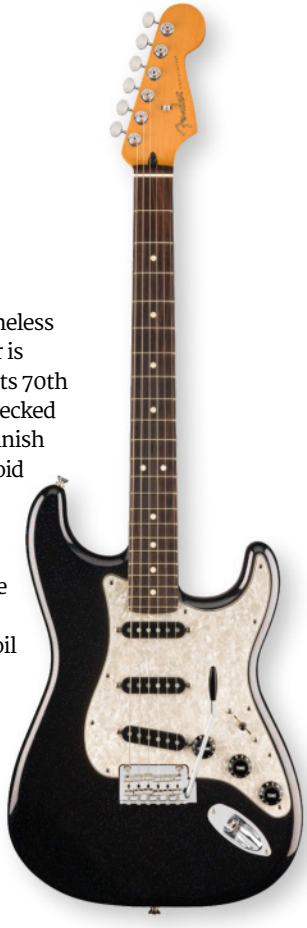
NEW GUITARS

MANSON MA JUNIOR & VERONA JUNIOR

Single-pickup guitars might conjure certain preconceptions of road-beaten, vintage-vibe instruments in your mind. But, it doesn't have to be that way, so says Manson whose new MA and Verona Junior models are made in the UK and will set you back £1,399. Spec-wise, they're identical, with the choice of singlecut (MA) or doublecut (Verona) shapes, both in five finishes (Neon Pink, Neon Green, Dry Satin Black, Miami Blue and Vivid Mustard Yellow). Both feature Obeche bodies with 12-inch radius maple necks, and rosewood fingerboards with a 25.5-inch scale length. The lone humbucker is a Manson Dirty Rascal, whose coils can be run in series or parallel via a push/push MOJO switch. They're also loaded with a kill button, bridge and machine heads from Gotoh, an anodised aluminium scratchplate, and come with a MONO gig bag. Phew!

PEDAL

FENDER 70TH ANNIVERSARY PLAYER STRAT



2024 marks 70 years since Leo's timeless doublecut first arrived, and Fender is kicking-off the celebrations with its 70th Anniversary Player Stratocaster. Decked out in the sparkly, luminous Nebula Noir finish (complemented by a four-ply, white pearloid scratchplate), it's got the classic Strat pairing of an alder body and C-shaped maple neck, which is also fitted with a 9.5-inch rosewood fingerboard, complete with rolled edges. The trio of single coils is taken care of by Pure Vintage '59 Single-Coil Strat models. There's a two-point tremolo and at the other end, Fender has fitted its ClassicGear tuners, which look vintage, but feature an 18:1 ratio for precise tension. Around the back, the neck plate is engraved to mark the Strat's 70th birthday, and it comes with a Fender deluxe gig bag. It'll cost you £959.

PEDAL

BOSS IR-2

If you're still yet to jump on the stompbox preamp/direct trend then Boss might be about to change your mind. The IR-2 packs 11 preamp types, along with 11 matching cabinet impulse responses from Celestion Digital into a compact-sized Boss pedal. The amps are a mix of classics from Mesa/Boogie, Marshall, Vox, Soldano and Fender along with Boss originals, with physical controls for selecting your model and adjusting level/gain/EQ and ambience. and you can jump between two models using the bypass switch, or by connecting an external footswitch. The IR-2 also allows you to import your own IRs via Boss' IR Loader app for Mac/PC. Elsewhere, it's got a built-in effects loop, stereo outputs, a headphone socket and USB interface for recording. It's priced at £181.

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SAM BLAKELOCK

As a co-founder of Pickup Music, it's safe to say Sam Blakelock is at the forefront of online guitar education. He's created a thriving online community for guitarists which continues to grow. With a Master's Degree in jazz performance and years of experience gigging all over the world, Sam is a top example of a contemporary guitarist.

TRIADIC GOSPEL LICKS

Pickup Music founder Sam Blakelock takes us through some sweet gospel licks

Triads are a crucial part of gospel, R&B, and jazz guitar. In fact, they're an important tool for guitarists of any genre. There's no better way to get acquainted than by getting hands on. So let's take a look at some beautiful triadic gospel licks that are guaranteed to get those creative juices flowing.

Sam Blakelock has eight licks for you to learn here, each one with its own unique flavour. The best part is at the end, they all tie together to create a glorious sequence. It's up to you whether you treat it as a package of cool licks or a longer study piece.

So grab your guitar, set up a smooth, clean tone, and let's slow things down a little. Make sure your hands are warmed up and we'll take you through eight triadic gospel licks.

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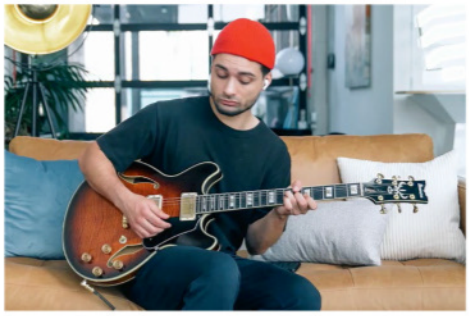

1 TOM MISCH-STYLE LINE AND TRIADS

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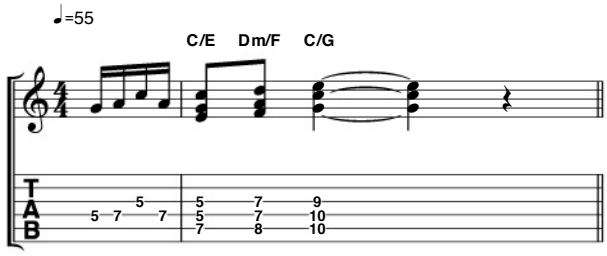

Let's start with a super laid-back feel at around 50bpm. We're in the key of C major (C D E F G A B) and using the classic A minor pentatonic box (A C D E G) as our home base. Focus on these three-note chord voicings – they're really useful shapes to have under your belt.

2 NEW POSITION AND TRIADS

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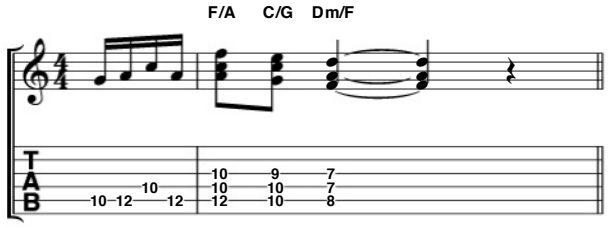

Leading on from the previous lick, we'll take the same phrase and move it up. It's really important to learn how to play any phrase in multiple positions on the neck. Not only does it help with fretboard knowledge, but it's also great for creating a smooth, relaxed playing style – no jumping up and down the neck.

3 MINOR IV CHORD

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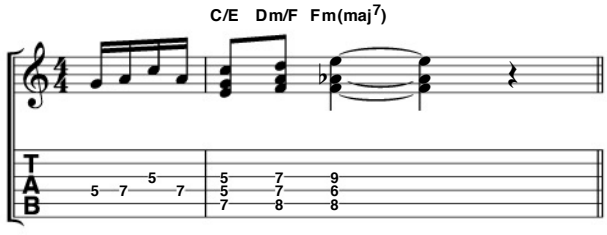

Nothing too tricky yet, right? Here's the same phrase, but this time it lands on the iv (F – the fourth note in C major), giving it a very different flavour. That last chord in the lick is an F minor/major 7th chord, which stems from the harmonic minor scale. It's an exotic sound and quite suspenseful.

4 SECONDARY DOMINANT TO THE VI

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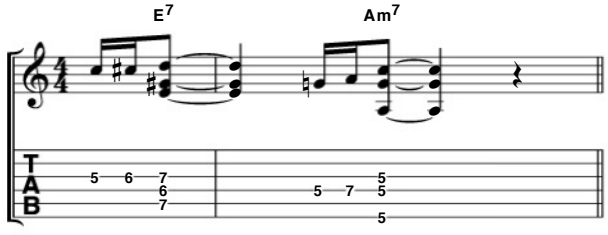

Here's a turnaround – E7 (a 'secondary' dominant, because it's not from the key we're playing in) to Am. The melody leads into the chords with chromatic notes, which is a great way to get that slinky jazz sound. Before you move on, put all four licks together and get comfortable playing them through in sequence.

5 SECONDARY DOMINANT TO THE II

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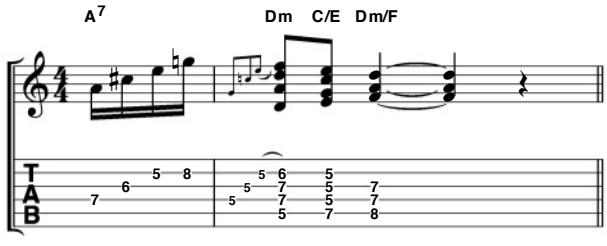

Let's try another secondary dominant chord (A7), but this time landing on the ii (D, or rather, Dm in this key). To create interesting passages, it's important to mix things up – not just stick to only triads or only 7th chords. This lick is a great demonstration of that idea based around an arpeggiated A7 chord.

6 DIMINISHED PASSING CHORD

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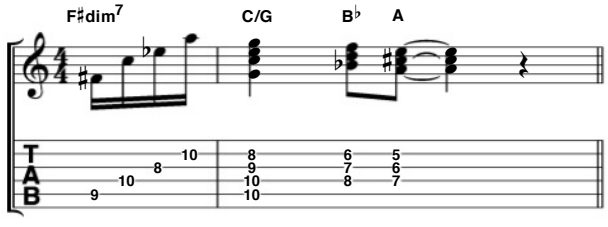

Continuing from the previous lick we'll keep going up through the scale. This part starts on an F diminished arpeggio and then moves to a C/G. After that, we descend to a simple B♭ triad and finally resolve to an A. Once you've got that, move on to the final two licks!

7 DIMINISHED SUBSTITUTION AND A II-V

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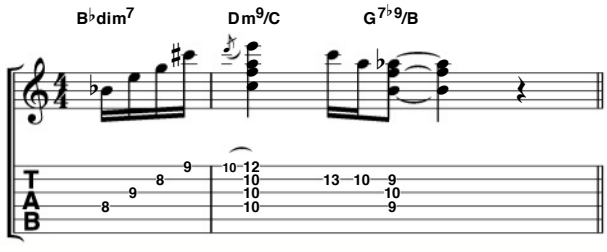

This lick also starts on a diminished chord – it's a different shape so take some time to familiarise yourself with it. The following chord is a Dm9 with a little hammer-on embellishment for some real neo-soul flavour. We finish off with a G7♭9. Practise making a smooth transition from the previous lick to this one.

8 DOUBLESTOPS

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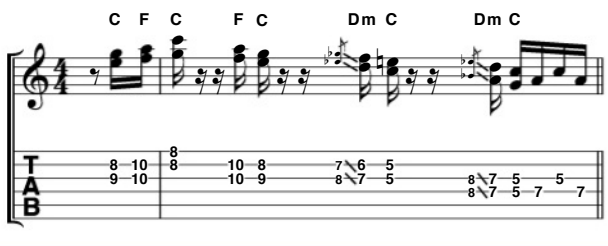

Let's finish this whole sequence in style. Feel free to add your own flare to this, you can use slides or hammer-ons to accent certain notes. Now for the fun bit – once you're confident with each individual lick, put them all together for an awesome sequence!

ROLLING WITH THE DEEP
From left: Sam Bowden, Seb Barlow, Matt Powles, Matt West, Ben Barlow

Words Phil Weller **Photos** Nat Wood

"CROWDS SING THE RIFFS BACK AT US. IT'S A GREAT FEELING!"

How to write a pop punk anthem – and how to make a solo sing. For **Neck Deep** guitarists Sam Bowden and Matt West, it's all about finding that one great hook...

Before a certain two American millionaires came along to revive the local football team, pop punk protagonists Neck Deep were the biggest thing to happen in Wrexham in a long time. From 2017's *The Peace And The Panic* peaking at number four in the US Billboard top 200, to touring with Blink-182, headlining Slam Dunk 2022 and boasting 3.6m monthly listeners on Spotify, the band's adrenalised anthems have proven a great success on both sides of the channel.

Then, with 2020's *All Distortions Are Intentional*, they threw caution to the wind, and with it, all their influences into their sonic melting pot. While this album proved a hit with fans, the band have returned to their roots with their new, self-titled release. A record stripped of its predecessor's leftfield adventures, what it serves up is a no nonsense collection of three-minute songs which confidently showcase what the band does best.

Guitarists Sam Bowden and Matt West discuss why they shrugged off big-name producers to record DIY, how they personalise the tried-and-tested pop punk formula, and provide top tips for writing killer pop-punk guitar solos.

You're back with a new album, which was self-recorded at your warehouse space. What inspired that decision?

Sam: In early 2021, we went to LA to work with Mike Green [who produced *The Peace And The Panic*]. But for some reason it just didn't work. We'd actually spoken to a number of producers, but we had a realisation and thought, rather than have someone else steer the ship, we should do it ourselves. The studio can be quite intense when there's a producer driving things forward and every second is money. Really, with these songs, all we needed was time and space. With *All Distortions*, we really did experiment and throw in all our influences. This time, we've never felt more inspired to write a straight pop-punk record. There's no acoustics, no ballads, it's all high-energy. We're really stoked with the outcome and Seb [Barlow, bassist] did an amazing job of self-producing it.

Have you found that there are pros and cons to working with a producer?

Sam: It's a two-way street. We've taken a lot of advice from producers, things like 'You have to be at the chorus by 43 seconds'. And we've taken certain corners, but when we look back at some of the songs, we wish we hadn't because that took away the charm of what they were supposed to be.

Especially early on when you have less confidence and experience, you think that everything a producer says must be true. But like all of us, we're throwing sh*t at a wall and hoping something sticks. It's definitely useful to have that understanding, but it's about learning when to apply them.

Talk us through the guitar recording set-up for the album...

Sam: In LA we were using real amps, but when we came back to self-produce, we used DIs and amp sims. You don't get as much width out of the guitars because there's no air being pushed out, like you get with an amp. But we're really happy with how the guitars came out. We used STL Tonality plugins, the Cory Wong Neural DSP pack, which is really awesome, and the Mixwave Milkman Creamer for cleans, but Seb's our tone wizard. We'd flick through a load of presets and give him some ballpark ideas and he'd know what to do.

What's your current live rig?

Matt: We've recently moved from Kemper to the Quad Cortex, which sounds so, so good.

Sam: When we've recorded albums in the past, we've captured tones with the Kemper, so we put them onto the Quad Cortex as our jumping off point before we fully integrated with the Neural tones.

Matt: That's the benefit of having a modeller, because we can reference tones from different records during our sets. To do that otherwise, the amount of gear that we'd have to carry with us would be insane. And the tones are consistent as well. We could land overseas somewhere and line up three JCM800s and all three of them would sound completely different. Now we know our tones are going to exactly the same as they did the day before.

We Need More Bricks features as TG's Riff of the Month. What's the story behind the song?

Sam: I wrote that on MIDI bass in a coffee shop. I was staying at my fiancé's studio apartment. She works remote and had meetings all day, so I went across the road to a coffee shop with my laptop and I ended up writing most of the song that day. It came out immediately, which never happens. I couldn't wait to get back to the apartment and put some guitars on it, because I knew how they were gonna sound. Seb came up with the lead part, him and Ben [Barlow, vocals] are overloaded with melodies, so many of the extra guitar layers come together when I work with them. They're overflowing with ideas, so as long as everything gets a chance, we'll land on something we collectively feel is right. Ben actually didn't like it at first, he usually listens to a song and feels a connection, but with this he really didn't know what it was going to be about. But in Neck Deep, if one of us loves a song, we'll see it through to the end. I'm stoked with how it turned out and Ben is too. He'd wanted to write a political song but it's quite a struggle sonically to find the right song to attach that to, it just took a while for him to get to that point.

Matt: The way we normally work is that there's a music bed before there are vocals, so I think it influences the tone of the lyrics from the get go. *Bricks* brought out Ben to make it more political because it was a bit grittier than something like *It Won't Be Like This Forever*, where there are more open chords [that] sound a lot lighter. The guitars have a huge influence on what lyrics Ben brings forwards for each song.

HERO OF THE DAY

"Billie Joe Armstrong was my guitar hero," says Matt West. "I remember buying *Total Guitar* when he was on the cover..."

Do you find some of your best music comes when it isn't forced?

Sam: There's something rewarding about persevering, seeing an idea through. But I think a lot of our ideas are better when you don't have to spend weeks on them. When we were in LA, writing in an Airbnb in 2021, we were working on [2022 single] *STFU* and Ben went to the toilet, which was in the room bordering where we were set up. I was just playing a four-chord progression, which we've used in multiple songs and, from the other room, we can hear Ben splashing and humming. He came back in and said, 'What were you just playing?' And he began to sing the whole chorus, pretty much word for word, of what became *It Won't Be Like This Forever*. So we closed the *STFU* session and started a new one. It came out of nowhere.

"IN POP-PUNK, THERE ARE ONLY SO MANY CHORDS AND PROGRESSIONS THAT EXIST"
SAM BOWDEN

Photo Getty

CHILD OF HELL
STONE COLD

Speaking of, is it hard to write interesting chord progressions and ideas whilst staying within the typical pop-punk framework?

Sam: It becomes more challenging as we progress through records. In pop-punk, there are only so many chords and progressions that exist. We can try mix it up with some chokes here and there, but ultimately, the progression is going to be the progression; it's all the other guitar layers where you can change the balance of how it feels. The vocals carry so much of the song, so without any direction and any influence, trying to come up with the initial frame can be really challenging. That's why we write as much as possible to come up with that hook, whether it's a guitar or a drum pattern that makes you stop and think for a second. Then we know we've got something worth chasing.

What are your most prized guitars at the moment?

Matt: Quite recently, I've been sticking a few vintage Gibsons in the arsenal which has been fun. I started with a Billie Joe Armstrong signature Les Paul Junior, one of the original runs in black, which has always been one of my dream guitars. From there I ended up buying a 1987 double-cut Junior in Tobacco Burst, which is the nicest guitar that I will ever own; it's an absolute travesty that I'm playing it and not someone much more skilled at the guitar. My friend, who I bought it off of, who owns a guitar store in Chester, also came across the exact same guitar in Cherry Red, so I had to buy that as well.

Sam: I've been using PRS since 2016. They're maybe not the most pop-punk-looking guitars, but the quality of build is flawless. I've got a Gibson SG which sounds sick, but after playing PRS for so long, I hate playing that standing up. There's only a certain amount of guitars that I'm comfortable performing with now because the PRS has such a contoured neck, nothing comes close to their comfort and they're pretty much always bang in tune.

Matt, you've been playing your Reverend Signature guitar since about 2018. How is that guitar holding up and has anything changed on it since then?

Matt: I've changed nothing and I don't need to because I'm very utilitarian when it comes to the guitar. My signature Reverend has one P-90 pickup and volume, tone and a bass contour knobs which are usually at 10. That's it. I gravitated towards the P-90 because Billie Joe Armstrong used them and he was my guitar hero. I remember buying *Total Guitar* when he was on the cover for *American Idiot*. It came with some stickers and I stuck them all over my guitar to pretend to be like him. When I learnt that he used a P-90 I was curious to try one and as soon as I did, I understood why he used them. It's more reactive than a humbucker, especially when I'm digging in.

THE EVIL SHRED
"A shreddy solo feels like a waste of a part," says Sam Bowden

You still have to push the noise gate with it, but the tonality of it really cuts through and I don't think I'll ever use another pickup at this point.

The solo in *They May Not Mean To...* really elevates the song. What was your approach to writing it?

Sam: That was me sat with a guitar, playing on a loop whilst Seb sat next to me and Ben stood over me, riffing melodies and pointing to the fretboard like, 'Do this!' I had something originally, but it was too shreddy and didn't serve the song, so, it was very collectively written in the end. I think it sounds ripping on the record.

So, what are your top tips for writing a memorable pop-punk solo?

Sam: In pop-punk, especially for Neck Deep, you have to be able to sing it. That goes with any guitar part. We'll find in certain parts of the world, especially in South America and Asia, that the crowds will sing the riffs back at us and it's so loud. It's a great feeling. In terms of the song, to just have a shreddy solo feels like a waste of the part because it just shows off that individual's moves musicianship and doesn't really do much for the audience. That's not the type of band that we are. It needs to be fun and still represent a guitar solo, but be simple enough where people can still sing along. The easiest way is to go off a vocal or a drum pattern, so there's already that phrasing that people are used to by that point in the song. Then you can take it for a walk before returning to that pattern so the listener doesn't get lost!

Neck Deep is out on January 19.

Photo Getty

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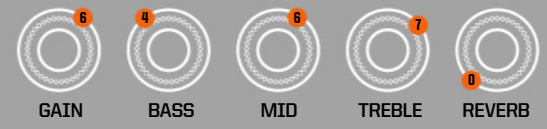
HOW TO

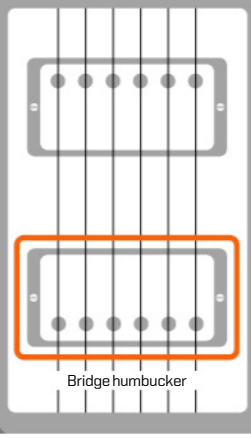
WHAT YOU WILL LEARN
- ✔ Octave shapes
- ✔ Open-string drone
- ✔ Powerchords

RIFF OF THE MONTH

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL DISTORTION





Use the bridge pickup on your guitar into the high-gain channel of your amp and use plenty of mids for a thick tone. Traditionally, the Neck Deep pair have used Orange amps and cabs, but they switched to Kemper Profilers a few years ago, and, more recently, are using Neural DSP Quad Cortex units.

NECK DEEP

We Need More Bricks

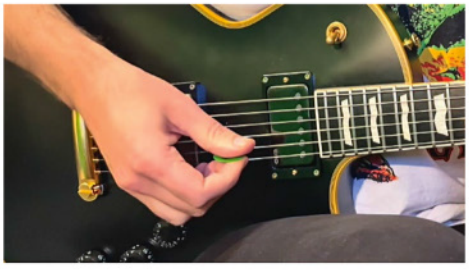
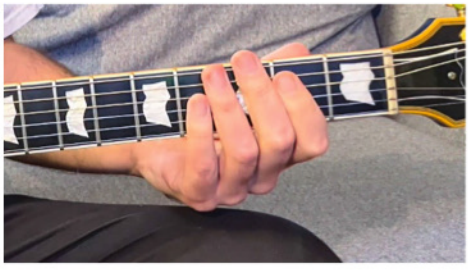
The latest single from Welsh pop-punk act Neck Deep starts off with a two-guitar arrangement, with Sam Bowden playing a higher melodic riff and Matt West holding down a powerchord part on the lower strings.

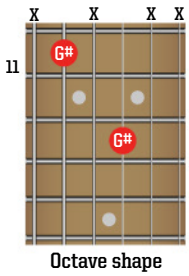
Our video features both of these parts played together to demonstrate how the two guitars harmonise and complement one another. We play the parts slowly so you can pick up on the finer details.

Sam's part starts with octave shapes played with the first and third fingers on the fifth and third strings. To strum the octaves cleanly, rest your first fretting finger on the idle strings in order to keep them muted as you move your hand up and down the fretboard. The second half of the riff uses the open first string as a drone and notes on the second string played together. Matt's chord part is played almost entirely with powerchords except for a E/G# chord which is actually an inversion of E major.

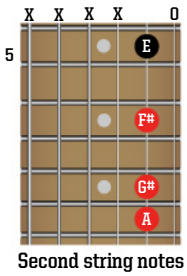
CHEAT SHEET...

Appears at: 0:00–0:22
Tempo: 177bpm
Key/scale: E major
Main techniques: Octaves, powerchords, open strings

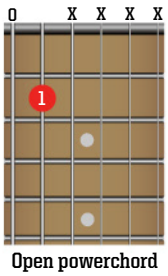




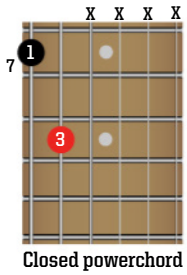
Octave shape



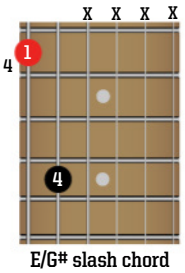
Second string notes



Open powerchord



Closed powerchord



E/G# slash chord

Sam plays octaves at the 11th (G#), 9th (F#), 7th (E, root note), 2nd (B) and 12th (A) positions. In the second half he switches to single notes on the second string played over the open E string.

Matt starts with an open position E5 powerchord, before switching to the closed shapes in the 7th (B), 9th (C#), 4th (G#) and 5th (A) frets. Watch out for the E/G# slash chord!

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Words Andrew Daly Portrait Andy Ford

"I STARTED DOING BENDS AS A JOKE TO MAKE MY FRIENDS LAUGH!"

Post-punk trio **Omni** are masters of minimalism, but guitarist Frankie Broyles is having fun with classic rock moves and ZZ Top-inspired tones

Frankie Broyles, the guitarist and leader of Omni, is a titan of post-punk minimalism in the modern era. He just didn't plan it that way.Before he formed Omni with bassist/vocalist Philip Frobos in 2011, Frankie had experienced mild regional success throughout the Atlanta area with indie rockers Balkans, and then served for two years with perpetually genre-confused legends Deerhunter. It was only when he and Frobos began writing songs together that Frankie began channeling influences from post-punk legends such as Wire, Television and Talking Heads.

"I guess the stuff we were listening to lent itself to a minimalistic approach," he says. "But we never intended to be a post-punk band; it just happened. We were listening to a lot of older bands, and even though we never meant to be post-punk, maybe it was inevitable."

Following three outstanding albums in *Deluxe* (2016), *Multi-task* (2017) and *Networker* (2019), the new record *Souvenir* is aptly titled – primed to be a memento for the keepers of the flame and newbies alike. At the heart of it all is Frankie's fretwork. And despite his calm demeanor, he is determined to push Omni to greater heights.

"The plan going forward is to keep trying to improve," he says. "We want to improve with every song. That drives me to keep making music. Wanting to improve, and the idea of chasing the perfect song, while never catching it. I'll keep chasing perfection, but I hope I never catch it because what would be the point, then? We'll spread this music to a wider audience, and hopefully they'll dig it as much as we do."

What first drew you to post-punk?
When Omni started, I had been listening to many different things, like late-'70s and early-'80s post-punk stuff. I was into bands like Magazine, Wire, Devo, and things like that. I was drawn to the simplicity and the minimalistic guitar sounds. That has always appealed to me.

Despite the guitars not being in your face, they're apparent throughout Omni's music. To expand on your attraction to minimalism, how do you view the guitar within the context of your music?
Interesting question. The guitar in Omni songs is huge. It's always the beginning of whatever we're doing, meaning we'll start writing a song, and I'll have either a riff or we'll have a simple bassline, and I'll write something on top of that. And depending on where the guitar leads me, we'll fit the bass and the drums into that.

I noticed the unique rhythm aspect of your playing, so it makes sense that it's intrinsically tied to the bass and drums.
Yeah, I look at it like a puzzle. It's like, 'How do I make this work and sound good at the same time?' But all the guitar work informs the drums, which is good because I also write all the drum parts. I use them as a tool to sometimes enhance the guitar parts. They're very interlocked ideas and a lot of times, a melody will follow. So, the guitar, while not being over-the-top, is central to the entire process.

Now that we're looking at Omni's fourth record, *Souvenir*, how have you evolved since the beginning?
It's hard to say, but I'm much less apt to put pressure on myself. I used to push hard to try and ensure everything was perfect, and because of that, recording stressed me out because I saw it as so final. Every song was just so… intense! It was very intense. But now, I've got a more relaxed approach where I'm more interested in experimenting and seeing what happens.

***Souvenir* sounds free and easy, so shedding the ratcheted-up mindset seems to have served you well.**
I think so, too. I enjoy the recording process now, whereas before, I might have become too tied up with the idea of, 'Is this the right decision?' Or, 'Should I do this or that?' I'm more open now. I'm also more excited about things happening that I didn't intend to. With *Souvenir*, I went into it with a fresh mindset as we hadn't been working on music over the pandemic, and a couple of years passed. So, like you said, it was important for this to be free and easy but also more energetic. I wanted to be excited about the music, and I want to excite other people, too.

But considering *Networker* received rave reviews, and then, to your point, the pandemic almost immediately shut you down, was there pressure to come back even stronger?
Surprisingly, I didn't feel any external pressure. I tried to be a relaxed songwriter, but I was still intense regarding the music. I felt *Networker* was subtle and mid-tempo, so maybe there was internal pressure for me to make *Souvenir* something *more*. I know I'm contradicting myself, but what I'm saying is time didn't make me feel pressured. Maybe, in my mind, it was important for us to make a less introverted record with *Souvenir*.

Looking at the first single *Exacto*, it features some classic angular guitar straight away. How did you dial in those sounds?
I love [Fender] Jaguars. I'm pretty much always playing one! But another key piece of gear came when my friend came over with a Fender Brownface Deluxe [6G3] clone. He built it over the pandemic, and it was great because it's essentially a replica of the one ZZ Top used back in the day. I got into playing that because it has this classic and slightly overdriven tone that factored heavily into the sounds across the record, including *Exacto*. But the Brownface aside, I also used a Music Man 112 [RD] and my EarthQuaker [Devices] Talons [High Gain Overdrive] a lot. I always have that pedal on unless I'm using the Brownface clone because then I'd use the distortion from the amp.

***Double Negative* is a standout track on the new album. How did that one come together?**
I am so happy to hear that, because it was one of the first tracks that I got excited about. So, Philip had a bass part, and we looked to create a sort of unified riff where we were both doing something that, aside from a couple of notes, was the same. We also wanted to be very minimal about it, like super minimal, to where we're doing the same thing, and the only wrinkle is the speed of it. So, *Double Negative* came together over two nights and was the first actual song written for *Souvenir*. It gave us the energy to keep working, as the stuff we wrote before had us saying, 'This is okay, but where is the passion?' I'm glad you like that song because it was a turning point in this album's writing process.

Is *Double Negative* the best representation of the guitarist you are today?
Hmm, I don't know about that. If I had to pick, I would go with *Compliment*. That's one where I incorporated some string bends, which have become a thing for me. I used to not bend strings at all, but I started doing it as a joke at live shows to make my friends laugh when I played classic rock riffs! Once I started doing it, it became like this massive part of my playing, and

POWER TRIO
"The guitar is central to the entire process," says Frankie (left).

at the end of *Compliment*, you can hear it.

Were there any moments while recording *Souvenir* where you put down the Jaguar and reached for another guitar?
I tried, but it was hard! Our producer Kris Sampson had a custom Telecaster that his brother-in-law made him, and it was a really nice guitar. I don't know if I recorded with it, but I did mess around with it. But one guitar I did use – I just don't remember on what song –is this custom Mustang that a guy here in Atlanta made me. But with the Jag, I've got two that I've been using for years: one from '97 and another from 2002, which are Japanese-made. But I used this Jag that Kris had in the studio from '65, which sounded terrific. That surprised me, and it made me realize that I've been playing mine hard for years, and both need fret work and to be serviced!

Brownface clone and the '65 Jag aside, were there any additional gear discoveries that impacted the album?
I got this cool G&L on Craigslist for $250. I didn't use it much on the record, but I probably did some writing on it. It's a fantastic guitar and fun to play. I've always liked G&L guitars, and for the longest time, I wanted one of those ASAT's from the '80s and '90s with the cool black textured plates and stuff.

What's your tried-and-true secret to proper post-punk guitar?
When I'm writing guitar parts, I keep pushing to come up with ideas until I find something I react to. I search for an emotional reaction or stuff that sticks in my head. And often, if I come up with something that I like, but it's not there yet, I'll do another track over it, and try to find whatever feeling it's lacking. And then later, when we're learning the songs, we have to try and figure out how to play both simultaneously!

And finally, what advice would you give young players?
Try always to be the best representation of yourself that you can be. And don't be afraid to get out and experiment with notes, sounds, and rhythms. I look at writing songs and guitar parts like putting a puzzle together, and that can be tough, so it's always important to remember to try and have fun doing it.
***Souvenir* is out on February 16.**

DARK AND DARKER
Tesseract, from left: Acle Kahney (guitar), Jay Postones (drums), Daniel Tompkins (vocals), James Monteith (guitar), Amos Williams (bass).

Words Phil Weller Portrait Andy Ford

"A TONE LIKE MUSICAL ELECTRICITY!"

How the two guitarists in **Tesseract** are putting a new spin on their progressive metal sound, with smoother tones amid the face-melting riffs...

British prog metallers Tesseract have helped shape many of the sounds that define the djent ideology, but on their latest album *War Of Being*, they are conscious of repetition. A series of "tone quests", propelled by guitarist Acle Kahney, have helped push the band's sound into darker, grittier territories, where the thin, glassy cleans and biting guitars that underscore their previous records have been usurped by body and warmth.

The reformed sonic landscape that Kahney has consequently created helps bring heaviness to the fore, as their riffs get angrier than ever. Believing that djent is a mentality more than anything else – where virtuosity is in nuanced grooves – Kahney and co-guitarist James Monteith discuss the explorative nature of their new album ahead of a UK tour with Unprocessed and Callous Daoboys…

How excited are you to get out in front of home crowds again?

James: It's our first headline run in the UK since 2018, which was a long time ago, so it's great to be going out and doing our show again and paying a whole bunch of new songs. With Unprocessed especially, we're sharing stages with virtuoso guitar players who are going to make sure that we're at the top of our game. Callous Daoboys are completely different from both other bands as well and have very inventive guitar players. I think it's a real mixed bill of interesting stuff.

***War Of Being* has some of your darkest guitar moments to date. What inspired the record's grittier edge?**

Acle: I was on a tone quest, trying different ideas out. The tendency is for Tesseract tones to be a little bit harsh or abrasive, so I wanted to EQ out the harsher frequencies, trying to find a more natural way of achieving smoother, darker tones. Trying to get a tone that is thick and tight at the same time is the hard bit, because you're losing a lot of low end before you hit any amps. Then you run the risk of it becoming too thin and brittle. I don't know how to describe it so that it makes sense to anyone else, but I like my tones to sound like musical electricity. That's what I was after. For example, the opening riff of *The Grey* was just me trying to experiment with and replicate the tones of other bands I was listening to. Then the riff came out of nowhere. I stopped hunting and started writing.

So, are we hearing amps or digital modellers on the new album?
Acle: I experimented with amps, but went back to the modelling amps. I love the sound of a Diesel amp going through a 4x12 in the room, but as soon as you mic it up, it doesn't quite come out how I want it to. So for the album, it's Axe Fx II for the rhythm tones and a mix of Kemper and Quad Cortex for the cleans and the wishy-washy ambient tones.

As guitarists, do you go for similar or contrasting tones from one other?
Acle: I tend to go for the same tone so it's not too distracting. I know some people like to have one amp on the left and one amp on the right on record, but I've never personally gotten on with that when I've tried it in the past. I just find it a little bit jarring. We've also got different pickups now and that can be enough just to give us a little bit of a difference from one another and give our sound a broader stereo image. Most of my guitars have Bare Knuckle Blackhawks on them, but I've recently moved over to a [Bare Knuckle] Silo set in one of my guitars which I really like; it's got a smoother sound.
James: I usually use Bare Knuckle Aftermaths, but on my new Ibanez LACS RGD, I've got a Silo set as well. My RGD 3127 has DiMarzio Fusion Edge 7s, which also does the job. So, I'm mixing it up between the three.

Your clean tones are highly sought after. A slew of bands have been trying to replicate the sound. But it feels like you've stepped away from that archetypal sound on *War Of Being*...
Acle: The 'Milton Keynes clean tone' was a Line 6 POD thing and I think I've rinsed it. I've used it on all our albums so far, so I've been trying to not rely on it this time around. We've tried to reset things, which is why we've gone for more spacey, reverby sounds on *War Of Being*.

So, what's your process when building new clean tones?
Acle: It was the same process as it was for the 'Milton Keynes' clean sound. I go for a Fender-style clean amp, or a Roland JC120, but with no cab sim; that's the secret sauce. It gives you that glassy top end and then you've got to control that with compression and EQ-ing it quite a lot so it isn't too ice-picky. The Quad Cortexes especially can get a little bit hissy, so you have to be careful with that, but once you've added some reverbs and delays, you should sound pretty close. When I'm tracking I'll use the bridge pickup for the low octave stuff and re-track it again, an octave up and that tends to be on a neck pickup. And then if I want to go stupid and do another octave, I'll track again with the Piezo pickup and there'll be panned left and right. So the high-end toppy stuff goes left and right and the lower-end octave tracks get narrowed into the middle of the mix.

When you unveiled the track *Natural Disaster* at ArcTanGent last year, it was described as having the heaviest Tesseract riff yet. What was the inspiration behind it?
Acle: I actually wrote that riff just after we did *Polaris* in 2015. It was originally meant for Kat Marsh, who does the backing vocals on *War Of Being*, as part of a remix for her band Lion Face. But nothing really came of that song, so while I was writing *War Of Being* I asked if I could have my riff back and she said yes. It's a fun riff!
James: I've noticed that when I've been playing the new songs live, when we come in with that opening riff, that's generally the one where we see people's faces melt. That might be our heaviest riff.

The *Natural Disaster* riff involves a lot of bends. How important are bends for bringing out the nastiness of a riff?
James: It's a very quick bend up, then a slow release down and to get that right is quite tricky. But I think when it's right it does add a really nasty kind of a jarring sound to the riff.
Acle: Whether we do a full- or a half-bend in a riff, it's just *vibing* it, really. I remember when we saw Alice In Chains in Australia at SoundWave Festival; their song *Stone* had just come out and that riff starts with a really big bend. I remember watching side of stage with James, thinking, 'This riff is f*cking great!' That was definitely a big inspiration for me. It took us a few weeks to get that bend locked in; I might over-bend, James might under-bend. Once we relaxed into it, it felt great. It's weirdly satisfying to have that synched up.

Dead notes and scratches seem an integral part to your riffs...
Acle: They can keep you locked in with the riff instead of just having dead silence. Scratches can bring you into the next note bang on time, kind of like a drummer might do with ghost notes. Sometimes those techniques will help you come up with a weird misplaced feel, too. Whether that's a downstroke or a down/up, you will automatically make it go into some weird groove but it will feel natural to play. They can be really important when you're writing riffs, and are often how I follow a riff.
James: There's a particular riff on the song *War Of Being* where there's this very tight rhythmic part which doesn't sound too tricky, but it's really quite hard to get nice and precise. That's a riff where it would be impossible to add any kind of scratches in the gaps.
Acle: The pickup choice is important, too. If you play that riff on the bridge it just sounds mushy and plastic. The neck is okay, but as soon as you go to the neck split-coil, it's thinned out and tightened. Riffs like that are designed for that pickup position. We do a lot of pickup

"I LEARNT LED ZEPPELIN'S KASHMIR WHEN I WAS 13 AND I HAVEN'T GOT BACK TO STANDARD TUNING SINCE"

switching live; half of the song learning is trying to get the transition between a riff into the next section, flicking between positions. That's why a lot of our guitars are wired so if we're on the bridge humbucker, one flick and we're in neck split-coil mode.

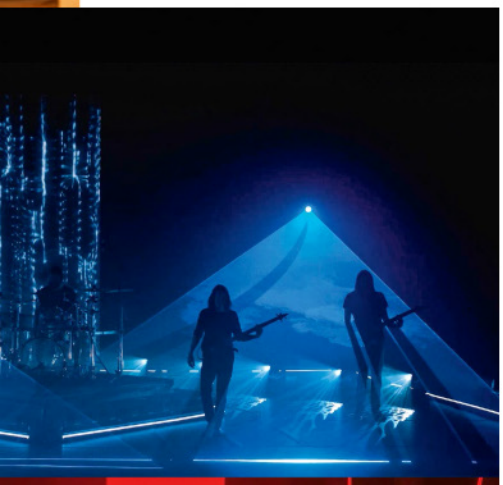
Djent riffs aren't always hard to play in terms of what your fingers are doing, but it can be very virtuosic when it comes to rhythmic complexity. How would you break that down?

Acle: Usually when I write, once I have the first phrase where I like where it's going, I'll loop it and let happy accidents tweak little elements of the riff, or listen back to it and move bits around if it doesn't quite sound right. It shouldn't feel forced, it should just be that you're improving it and not getting too bogged down by it. A lot of djent riffs are like a typewriter where they tap and tap across a line until it naturally comes back around to the start.

And for someone looking to learn Tesseract riffs, they might be a little confused by your tuning choices, too...

Acle: It's basically DADGAD tuning, which came from learning Led Zeppelin's *Kashmir* when I was 13 years old and I haven't got back to standard since. So, you've got the DADGAD intervals but transposed for a seven string in A – A E A D E A – with a high D string added on. Then on certain songs like *Legion*, we'll drop the seventh string a semitone to A♭. That's quite handy for doing atonal stuff. It's easy to make up dissonant sounding riffs because there's no easy way to play in nice scales!

Tesseract tour the UK in February. War Of Being is out now.



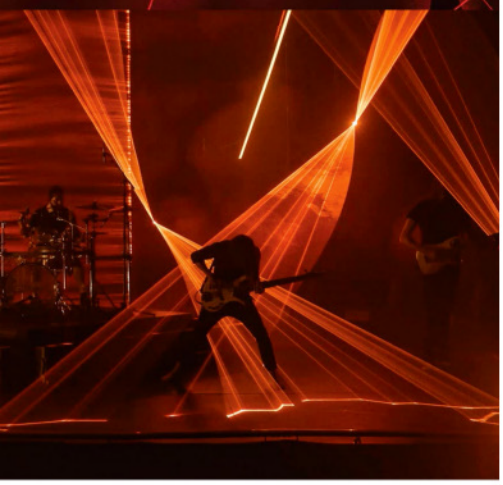


Photo Getty

"YOU'VE GOT TO KEEP IT TIGHT!"

Djent isn't the easiest style of guitar playing to get into, but James and Acle have some advice for newbie djentlemen to get them started...

James: Throw traditional looping out the window, learn a phrase or pattern and learn to feel it. Don't overthink it or try to count it. Some of our new riffs are all over the place – it's about getting lost in the groove of them. Meshuggah is mostly responsible for opening up this whole kind of jazz-influenced approach to metal and how you break down and approach rhythms. So, you should be looking at music slightly outside of the conventional rules of what metal music has done previously.

Acle: Being able to jam to a drum machine or a click is a big part of it, and recording yourself helps you find where the mistakes are and highlight what you need to practice. Playing with an amp in a room is fun, but as soon as you record with a digital amp, it's gonna pick up all the mistakes and scrappiness. It's good to be able to listen back and see where you're out of tune or going wrong. A lot of my practice is looping stuff over and over again until I've nailed it.

James: In terms of rhythm guitar playing, it's very, very disciplined because it requires a lot of accuracy and cleanness. It's kind of the opposite of thrash, where you're basically just playing as fast as you can. You've got to keep it tight. There is a lot more a lot more nuance, rhythmically.

Words Ellie Rogers

"I LOVE GUITARISTS THAT STARTED IN JAZZ BUT MOVED INTO POP"

With a famous fan in Jimmy Page, rising star **Rosie Frater-Taylor** has a unique guitar-meets-vocal vamping style – now with added punch

It's a bold claim, but one that we're prepared to make: there is no other guitarist in the UK right now who sounds quite like Rosie Frater-Taylor. Brought up in a musical household, with a jazz drummer for a father and a jazz singer for a mother, the rapidly rising young Londoner specialises in combining accessible songcraft with wicked jazz-infused guitar chops as she deftly blurs the boundaries between rock, alt-pop, neo soul, new-school jazz and folk.

Having first picked up a guitar at a very young age, Rosie possesses an innate kind of connection to her instrument that often manifests itself as a tendency to sing or scat along in unison with the improvised melodies that come flowing out of her fingertips. A technique originally born out of necessity (she used to need to hum lines aloud in order to find them on the fretboard), it's developed into a trademark style that never fails to turn heads – even winning her a high-profile fan in the form of Jimmy Page, who once caught a solo performance of Rosie's at The Troubadour and felt compelled to personally congratulate her on her impressive skills.

"He was just saying all this nice stuff," she recalls, still in slight disbelief over the encounter, which occurred some years ago now. "It'd be funny to meet him again and actually have a proper conversation about songwriting and guitar playing," she smiles. "But he's probably very busy!"

Since that moment, Rosie has amassed well over three million streams on Spotify, further refined her signature guitar-meets-vocal vamping style and even given lessons on the topic for Pickup Music. "It's sort of just become a part of my tone and my playing," she says casually. "People seem to resonate with it. I'm a big George Benson fan. He did it as well and I really like the way it makes your lines sound because it changes your focus – not that I even think consciously about it anymore, to be honest!"

Although she claims not to have perfect pitch, Rosie theorises that – through the sheer number of practice hours she's put in over the years – she typically just knows how the notes are going to sound before she frets them, and that's what enables her enviably free-flowing style.

"The thing I love to do when I solo is just to take a line and do as much with it as I possibly can, like change the rhythm or slightly vary it in different ways," she suggests, by way of advice for anyone looking to get their teeth into the slightly intimidating world of jazz improv. "You really don't need to know a lot of information to play like that. You just need to have a starting point. Playing with other people in that context and putting yourself out of your comfort zone is also important."

But Rosie isn't just a gifted improviser, she's a boundlessly creative and ever-evolving singer-songwriter too. Once a solitary bedroom recording artist, her first two self-produced LPs (2018's *On My Mind* and 2021's *Bloom*) were soft, woody and primarily cut using acoustic guitars because she reckons it's "way easier to get a nicer sound from an acoustic instrument than an electric guitar in a bedroom." But now, influenced by having spent a good chunk of time touring with her recently formed trio, her astounding new album, *Featherweight*, takes a more boisterous turn. Packed with full-band studio productions, electric guitars and even a hearty dose of overdrive, it's a new direction for the jazz wunderkind, and one that she's absolutely relishing.

"My drummer Tom Potter is an insane drummer and I sort of owe this new-found energy to him," she says modestly. "The grooviness, the heavier touch and punch definitely stems from playing with him, and we've played a few bigger stages at festivals which demanded a certain vigour. So, that was the foundation for the new record."

But you can't simply apply a fat rhythm section to any old tunes and expect to be rewarded with a record as compelling or downright unusual as this. No, there's something special about Rosie Frater-Taylor that makes her a stand-out proposition in the somewhat overcrowded singer-songwriter space. "I love guitarists that started in the jazz world, but sort of transitioned into the pop world," she says, citing Benson, Pat Metheny and John Scofield as key influences. She's following a similar trajectory, and never flexes her considerable musical education for the sake

"IT'S VERY INSPIRING TO WATCH SOMEONE WHO IS BETTER THAN YOU AND HAVING TO RISE TO THAT CHALLENGE"

of it. "I feel like the jazz will always be in my playing, but I almost have a bit of an adverse reaction to it these days," she laughs, having spent endless childhood hours learning the standards as a member of the National Youth Jazz Orchestra, before going on to study at The Royal Academy of Music.

Nowadays, she takes her cues from other singer-songwriter guitarists who are expanding the rulebook with their own idiosyncratic approaches. Her number one influence is Madison Cunningham, whom she discovered just before starting work on *Featherweight*, and whom she got the chance to support in the UK back in 2022. It turned out to be one of the most formative experiences of her career to date.

"I saw her every night," beams Rosie. "I watched every show and it's a very inspiring thing, watching someone who is better than you and having to rise to that challenge. I'm a big admirer of how she combines the musicality and the songwriting and makes it so accessible and so genre-less."

Not wanting to "overstep the mark" into overzealous fangirling during the tour, Rosie refrained from approaching Madison for gear or playing advice, but confesses to secretly having had a go on one of the US virtuoso's acoustics when she wasn't looking. "It was the little rubber bridge guitar," she discloses. "It had flat-wound strings on it, and it was interesting. It sounds great, but that's kind of her thing and I didn't want to copy her. That's the thing about distinctive guitar tones – there's no point stealing someone else's!"

Instead, Rosie usually opts for a Gibson Les Paul, which she runs through a Fender Deluxe Reverb for the kind of rounded clean tones heard on album tracks like *Falling Fast*, *Heartbeat* or even the surprise cover of TLC's *No Scrubs*. "I love Gibson guitars and I always have," she enthuses. "I think they're amazing for the songwriter thing and the jazz thing because they have a very warm sound. Even though people like Slash play Les Pauls, I just find – for me – they work better in a warmer, jazzier sound-world."

That said, *Featherweight* also takes several trips into much grittier territories, with stand-out songs *Hold The Weight* and *Give & Take* boasting much gnarlier and more angular tones than she typically gets from her trusty LPs. Any time a track called for a certain sonic shake-up, she would reach for a highly unusual blue Supro Westbury. Fitted with "field-coil" pickups, she first stumbled across the oddball axe while dabbling in a spot of collaborative work with Snarky Puppy's Michael League.

"He had one because I think Snarky Puppy were endorsed by Supro at one point," she recalls. "It was the only electric guitar he had at his studio and it's the craziest sounding guitar you could imagine. It sounds so weird, but it sounds so good! It's very smooth, but it also has a very plucky sound. The thing I love about it is that it sounds great with my vibrato, and it sounds great looped and layered. There's a bunch of layered guitars on *Give & Take*, and it just fits together really nicely. But it's a weird guitar and you don't see anyone with them because, well, Supro's an amp brand!"

ALL THAT JAZZ
"Even though people like Slash play Les Pauls, I find they work better in a warmer, jazzier sound-world."

Further describing *Give & Take* as "the statement track on the record," and the one that diverges most from her "usual sound," Rosie also recalls drafting in friend and producer Lewis Moody to help coach her through a mild phobia of dirt in order to achieve bold dynamic shifts she knew the song was crying out for. "He literally just bent down to my pedalboard and turned the overdrive right up," she laughs. "It was one of those things where I was quite freaked out to do that because I come from a subtler place, but it was exactly what the track needed. I was frightened to go there, but if you're going to do it, don't half do it!"

Having grown up playing through a very minimal rig that consisted of a guitar, a Henriksen JazzAmp and practically nothing else, Rosie now finds herself emboldened to try out a more daring range of effects, and has recently acquired a Wampler Tumnus Deluxe and a Boss Blues Driver. She's started toying with phasers and professes to using "a lot of vibrato and reverb" within the trio setting to "pad out the sound and make it feel more full".

"I'm not an expert at this sound yet," she confesses. "I think sometimes I go a bit overboard with it and I need to work on making it work in the set." But the crucial thing is that Rosie has already found her unique guitar 'voice' through a lifetime of no frills playing, writing and improvising – and no amount of bells and whistles on top will ever change that.

"I think that's where everyone needs to start," she stresses. "Don't start with the pedals, please!"

Featherweight is out in February.

"IT WOULD BE FUNNY TO MEET JIMMY PAGE AGAIN AND ACTUALLY HAVE A PROPER CONVERSATION ABOUT GUITAR PLAYING"

Champion 100
Gibson
Les Paul
MODEL

Words Ellie Rogers **Photos** Paolo Terlizzi

"I'M STILL LEARNING. HONESTLY!"

Matteo Mancuso's guide to mastering fingerstyle and unravelling the mysteries of jazz

Matteo Mancuso is one of the most astonishing young guitar players on the planet. The jazz virtuoso's flawless electric guitar skills and jaw-dropping fingerstyle techniques were first observed by thousands on YouTube and Instagram, before his debut album *The Journey* made him one of the most talked about players of 2023.

He's won the admiration of masters like Al Di Meola, Joe Bonamassa and Tosin Abasi, and Steve Vai has declared the future of guitar to be safe, so long as people like Mancuso are around to keep the evolutionary wheels turning.

As Matteo himself says: "Jazz can be extremely simple as well as extremely complex. Complexity doesn't mean that it's good." But as a player who combines elements of shred, jazz and classical styles, a lot of what he does is complex. In fact, his playing seems almost superhuman at times.

However, he utilises smart time-saving tactics rather than heavy theoretical principles to help him traverse the fretboard in show-stopping style. His motto: "Think less, play more…"

What are the fundamentals of your fingerstyle technique?
I basically have two main positions. The first one is the appoggiato playing style, which is like the thing you see with most bass players. Then, there's the straight classical guitar technique that I use more for arpeggio-based stuff, or if I have to do some string skipping arpeggios and things like that, because it's easier to move across the strings if you also have your thumb available. When I'm playing appoggiato, I'm holding my thumb on the pickup most of the time, so I only have three fingers available. I can't use my pinky so it's always the index, middle and ring fingers. When I'm playing the other way – in Italian it's called *tocco libero* – I can also use my thumb but I have slightly less volume. That's basically how I play everything. It's 100 percent fingerstyle!

How would you say your technique compares to other fingerstyle electric guitarists, such as Mark Knopfler?
I know about Mark, but I didn't really come up with this technique until I studied some classical guitar. Most of the techniques that I'm using are from the classical guitar world and some of them are from flamenco. Technically speaking, it's more from the classical world than the electric world.

For anyone who's only ever played with a pick, what is your top tip for getting the fingers working?
I'd suggest that the first step should be hybrid picking. It's not fingerstyle and it's not just picking, it's a mix of both techniques. A perfect example of that would be Tom Quayle, who's a British player that uses a pick, but at the same time also uses two fingers for some of his lines. A lot of modern players use this technique and I think it can be a good starting point. Then, if you want, you can get rid of the pick and start using your thumb and index.

How does using your fingers affect your tone?
You get a darker tone and the attack is slightly different. With your three fingers, basically everything is an upstroke and the only downstroke is with the thumb. So sometimes, if you want to achieve a different sound, you may want to use a different finger. The thumb sounds more powerful on the low strings, so I prefer to use my thumb on the lower strings and use my three fingers for the others. An important thing is nails. I use my nails and they're not too long. If you played only with the

"WHEN YOU'RE LEARNING A SONG, YOU LEARN THE THREE BASIC FOUNDATIONS OF MUSIC: RHYTHM, HARMONY AND MELODY"

flesh, the sound would be too muddy and dark. With my nails, I can achieve a more defined attack.

Do you use acrylics or just your natural fingernails?
It's a mix of both and, actually, I mostly use gel nails. I used acrylics some months ago, but I like the sound of the gel better because it's a little bit softer and you get a different attack. Plus, it looks more like a real nail! My thumb is the only one that stays natural because I don't really use it a lot, compared with the other three.

Jazz can be a tough style to break into. How could people start thinking about its principles in a way that feels accessible?
When people think about jazz – especially guitar players – they think about theory and scales and strange arpeggios. Sometimes jazz is not really about that. Sometimes it's not really about complexity. There are some jazz tunes that are incredibly simple like an AC/DC tune. A way that you can get into jazz is by listening to players that are in-between. I don't always suggest Wes Montgomery or Barney Kessel because they're too traditional. I'd suggest for a rock player to start with the fusion guys like Scott Henderson, Frank Gambale or Allan Holdsworth because they have the rock influence as well, so you can hear the similarities.

How would you go about transforming a pentatonic lick into a jazz lick?
There are multiple ways of doing it and it depends on the context. What I learned was: whatever you play, it will sound good if you land on a good note. I always suggest implementing some chromatics in your pentatonic scale. There are a lot of exercises and patterns you can do, and – if you want to land on a good note – there are passage notes you can use that are always a half-step above or a half-step below.

If we have an example of B minor, you can use the target notes – which are simply the notes of the chord – and play around with the chromatic stuff. The important thing is that the landing note on the strong beat should be a note in the chord.

How did you learn to visualise the fretboard?
I'm still learning, honestly! The guitar is a really complex instrument to visualise because we don't use a symmetrical tuning. It's perfect 4ths and then there's this major 3rd between the G and the B that screws everything up! I don't always think about scale boxes. I prefer to think about chords and it's the form of the chord that guides me. I know where the target notes are because I know the shape of the chord. Then I only have to know the extra notes that build the scale. For example, if I do a major 7 chord, I already know that those four notes are good. In order to build a scale, I only have to add three more notes. Most of the time, I'm searching for just three more notes in my mind, and that builds the right notes for the context. I try not to think about modes. When I'm playing over a G7 altered chord, for example, I don't want to think about Super Locrian because I don't have the time, especially if I'm improvising. I just want to think about the closest relatable thing that's available to me. So, instead of thinking about G Super Locrian, I'll be thinking about A melodic minor because

CHORD PROGRESSION
"It's the form of the chord that guides me," Matteo says

"WITH MY NAILS, I CAN ACHIEVE A MORE DEFINED ATTACK"

it's the closest melodic minor I have and I know the melodic minor much better than the Super Locrian scale.

What is your practice routine like?
I try to grab the guitar, play every day and come up with different licks. Or, if there's a song I like, I try to learn it. Maybe I'm on the lazy side of things, but I don't like to have a structured practice routine where I play scales for an hour and then arpeggios for another hour. I don't have the attention span to do that! I believe that if you learn songs it's always a good choice because songs have a lot of things inside them that help you to become a better musician. When you're learning a song, you learn the three basic foundations of music: rhythm, harmony and melody. You can study these things separately, but if you just study a song, you study them together. I think it's more useful and you have more fun.

You maintain quite a controlled sound even when playing rockier styles. What gear helps you achieve that?
I'm a big fan of digital amp modelling. Contrary to most guitar players, I don't really like tube amps in a live context. Digital is just more reliable. Even in the recording process, all the stuff you have to do to get good at recording amps just wasn't for me. So, amp modelling was the right choice. Mostly, I use a Line 6 Helix and it's my go-to for live and recording. Sometimes I also use plugins from Universal Audio.

How do you set-up your Revstar to suit your style?
I usually use 0.010s as my go-to tension. The action isn't really low because I don't like string noise. I always try to keep it in good balance, even if I do tapping. I know it's harder if you have a high action, but I prefer not to sacrifice the sound for economic playing. Right now, I have one which is the prototype of my future signature guitar. It's a custom model made for me, but it's not really a fancy guitar. It has Lollar Imperial pickups and locking tuners because I'm lazy about changing my strings!

1 MATTEO-STYLE ARPEGGIO GROOVE
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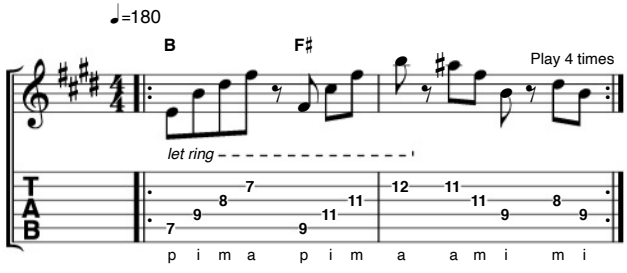

Here, we're looking at Matteo's fingerstyle arpeggio technique. Use your thumb to pick the fifth string and your first, second and third fingers to pluck the adjacent strings in a one-finger-per-string style. Keep the riff rhythmically even by ensuring the rests are the same duration as the notes.

2 CHROMATIC LICK
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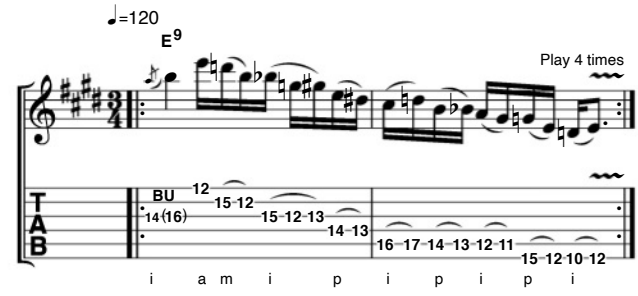

This lick blends the E Mixolydian mode and blues scale as well as some chromatic passing notes in Matteo's trademark shreddy jazz-blues sound. Use the fingerings below the tab as a guide, but feel free to use whichever fingers are most comfortable.

3 TAPPING IDEA
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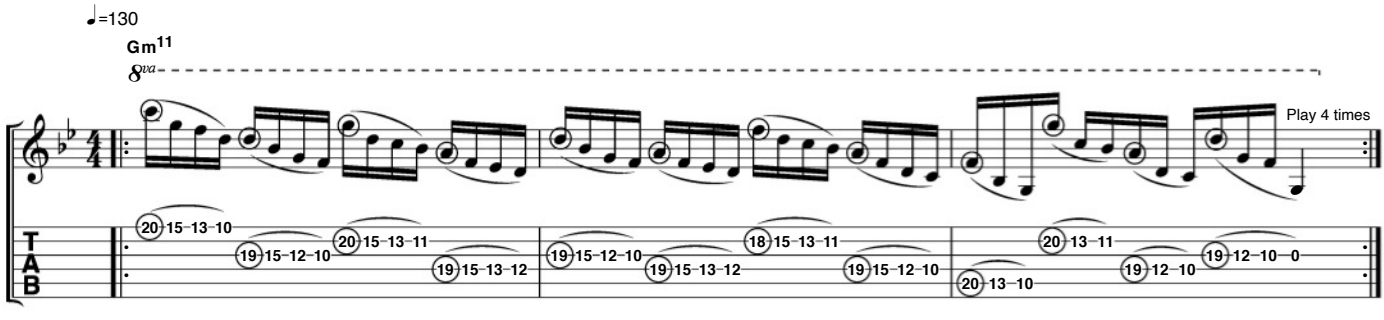


This lick based in G minor (G A B♭ C D E♭ F) and is played with tapping and string-skipping to create interesting interval jumps. Practise each hand separately before combining them for the complete lick. Matteo often uses a fret-wrap near the nut to help mute the strings and make his licks extra clean.

Words Amit Sharma

"THE SIMPLE PARTS ARE THE HARDEST TO GET RIGHT"

Lzzy Hale's recipe for meaty arena rock and killer tone

In the promotional video for her new Kramer Voyager signature, Lzzy Hale can be seen passing her guitar through a television set into the hands of a young girl dreaming about her future life as a musician. And while this advert, which premiered on Gibson TV back in December, certainly does its job in selling the latest model for the Halestorm singer/guitarist, there's also a deeper message and meaning behind it. And rightly so, given that Hale has now joined an elite handful of players (Slash, Jerry Cantrell and Dave Mustaine) as a Gibson Brand Ambassador – in her case, marking the first female player to be awarded such a lofty and highly coveted title…

"I love that it's being talked about so much," Lzzy says. "Something like this gives all the girls out there even more permission to pick up the instrument. I know there are some women who might feel, 'Why are you even mentioning it, can't you just let the talent speak for itself rather than play up to being the first female whatever?' But for me, it's a personal choice…

"Because I remember what it would have meant for me when I was growing up. I was looking for someone I could see my reflection in, and there wasn't really anyone… these conversations weren't even happening. When I was younger, female musicians were just a novelty. People would think, 'Oh, you're talented' and then say, 'Oh, we're going to put you on the girl's night at the local club!' I had to work very hard to get here. I want all the girls out there to know if I can do this – some dork from Pennsylvania with no music contacts or clue how to play when the band started – then so can they. Nothing is impossible!"

What exercises and practice regimes helped you become the player you are today?

Not many, because I get distracted easily! But I do try to practise with a metronome, especially before we start touring, going through simple pentatonic shapes. One thing I love to do is make something up on the spot with my voice. Then I will mimic it on guitar, switch on the metronome and slowly increase the speed. There's a simplicity in creating something from nothing. It doesn't have to go with anything. It can just be a cool idea that inspires me to work on my technique. I will make sure each note rings clearly and ask myself if I should use downstrokes or alternate picking. Or does it sound better played in triplets? My best advice to all the guitarists out there is to sit down and write the things you practise. That's what stops me from getting bored. On the other hand, Joe [Hottinger, Halestorm lead guitarist] is very regimented. He'll work on different techniques for weeks until he figures it out. I don't have that attention span! It has to be instantaneous. I never think about being good at something in two year's time… it's more like, 'I'm gonna do this tonight!'

Some of your most famous riffs are in drop D. What is it about that tuning that inspires you?

Drop D is childish reckless abandon for me. I was actually a piano player first. I switched over to guitar when I was 16 because we lost our first guitarist. I didn't know what to do! But the only people left were me and my little brother on drums, so I was forced into learning and then fell in love with it. I didn't know if we'd ever find another guitarist. Maybe it was going to be two of us like The White Stripes! I had a few lessons and then one of my friends introduced me to drop D, which saved my life because we had shows coming up and I needed to learn things fairly quickly with the least amount of effort. All I needed to remember was what fret to play rather than different shapes!

And then of course there's the extra heaviness it creates…

I love the gritty sound of it. Our bass player Josh [Smith] would be fascinated by some of my ideas, asking me why I came up with specific things, like playing a regular powerchord shape but in drop D, which would create a different sound. It helps you skip a couple of steps and take the brain out of it, using more of a primal instinct. That can be detrimental, because you're not learning in a chronological way that gives you a good foundation for later, which I realised later in life. I was a bit lazy in the beginning. I didn't bother learning chords or scales, so later on I had to buckle down. But those early moments gave me songs like *It's Not You*, all spurred from that naivety. It was just me being dumb, but also not being scared by that. I was diving head-first into the shark tank!

THINKING BIG

"We love meat and potatoes rock 'n' roll that will hit the back of the arena," Lzzy says.

So what would you say is the hardest Halestorm riff to play?

Which is the one I get wrong the most? I think there's definitely a dance with *I Am The Fire* because I use a double-neck. Some of it is in drop A, other parts are in standard. It's a heavy guitar… I should have gotten it chambered but my pride got in the way! I guess the most complicated riff I've written is *It's Not You*. And even though I'm mimicking the guitar with my vocals, *Uncomfortable* is another hard one. You might think singing and playing the exact same thing is easy but it's really not. The one I'm most proud of is *Daughters Of Darkness*, which came from those teenage years of drop D experimenting. I often find the simple parts are the hardest to get right. We love hypnotic simplicity: meat and potatoes rock 'n' roll that will hit the back of the arena and make the most impact, rather than overcomplicate things and become too self-serving.

You've tended to stick with Gibson Explorers going into Marshall JCM800s. Is that still your main recipe for tone?

Tone is an ongoing quest for me but a lot of it comes down to simplicity. I'm still running those Marshalls. Recently I've backed off the distortion from the amp and become more dependent on an Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer, the little green guy, or some kind of boost. I've also been experimenting with using two amps, which goes back to when I was starting out. Back then I had a Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier and one of my dad's old Fender Bassman amps, which sounded very clean. Those two amps combined worked so well – one being overly saturated and the other being completely not that. That sound is something I've always been after because it's clean, and very human-sounding, but also with a heaviness you can hide behind! There has to be a deeper tonality, you can't just sound like white noise.

Are there any other pedals that you simply couldn't live without?

One of my favourite pedals was gifted to me by a fan outside our bus, an original Klon. I've been generous and let Joe borrow it… or rather, steal it! That is one pedal I always have close by.

"MY BEST ADVICE TO ALL GUITARISTS IS TO SIT DOWN AND WRITE THE THINGS YOU PRACTISE"

Photo Getty

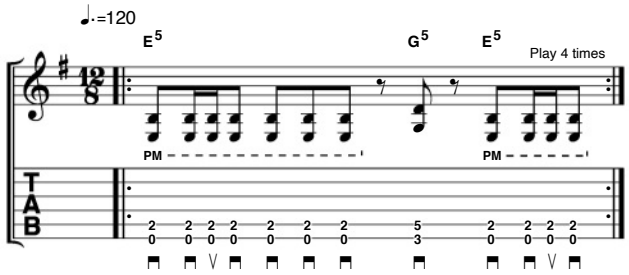
It sounds classic and there's something very unique about it – you dial in a great tone and then it works more like an icing on the cake, creating a nice sheen. The Jerry Cantrell signature is my favourite wah and I've been using that for years but recently I've been using my fingers to create that kind of effect, making certain parts pop out and sound more vocal.

As for the new signature guitar, the combination of the Black Diamond Holographic Sparkle finish, single pickup in the bride and Floyd Rose makes it quite the eye-catcher...

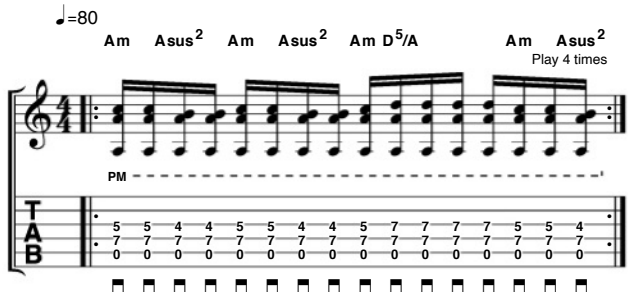
This guitar has been a long time coming. I love one-trick ponies, the instruments that are just like, 'Hey, I just do this but I do it well!' That's why I love the Joan Jett Melody Maker. You just have one pickup and a killswitch, that's it! You don't even need to turn the volume down. This new Kramer is built for one purpose and that's to be a screamer! I was trying to imagine what kind of guitar I would have been playing in the mid-'80s. In 1986 they were using some kind of holographic lead car paint for guitars but I could not find that... probably because it's not legal anymore!

It's a very different beast to last year's Gibson Explorerbird – which made history for combining the body of an Explorer with the headstock of a Firebird...

That idea came about because I was at NAMM doing stuff for Gibson. We went out for dinner and Cesar Gueikian [CEO] was there. He's like the rock star over at Gibson, coming up with all the epic sh*t. I realised that night you have to be very careful what you say around him because even if it's just a silly idea, he will say, 'Oh yeah, we can figure that out for you!' And at the time I was saying how cool an Explorer/Firebird hybrid would be. I was just spitballing, I wasn't saying, 'Let's do it!' Months later, this white guitar showed up at my house with a note saying: 'We made this for you, maybe it could be what we work on next?' So yeah, be careful around that guy, otherwise a guitar might show up at your doorstep!

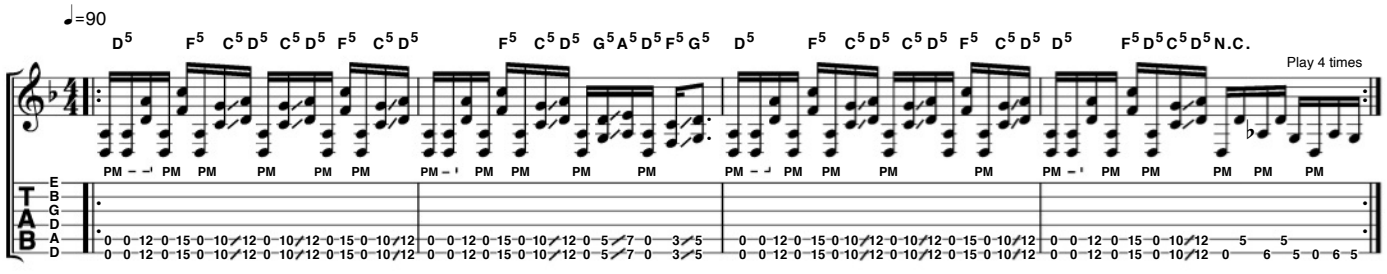
1 12/8 GROOVES bit.ly/tg380audio

This riff is played with palm-muted powerchords with the side of your palm resting on the strings near the bridge for a chunky percussive sound. Play the rhythm with downstrokes for the most part, with upstrokes added for the quicker 16th notes on beats 1 and 4.

2 MELODIC DIAD RIFF bit.ly/tg380audio



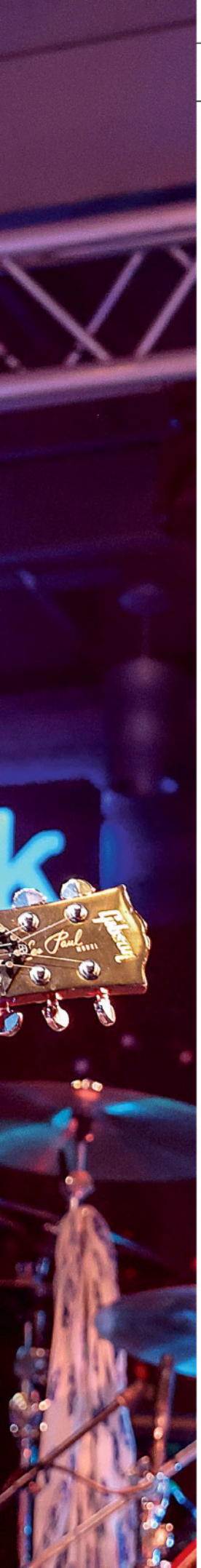
This is a relatively simple riff, with diad shapes (played over a repeating open fifth string A) outlining a melodic riff. Keep your third finger on the fourth string throughout – the other notes fall fairly naturally under your other fingers. Make sure to palm-mute throughout.

3 DROP D RIFF bit.ly/tg380audio



This riff uses powerchords along the lowest two strings. Each shape is played using just one finger thanks to the drop D tuning – which places every pair of notes at the same fret. Switch between your first and third fingers to navigate the position shifts and take note of where to switch between palm-muted and un-muted notes.

"I'M A SLOPPY GUITAR PLAYER! I'LL BE THE FIRST TO ADMIT THAT"



Words Andrew Daly

"THE BEST GUITAR SOLO IS A SONG WITHIN A SONG"

Ace Frehley: the guitar hero of KISS, and an influence for Tom Morello, Dimebag and many more

As the lead guitarist in the original line-up of KISS, Ace Frehley is a hugely influential figure in American rock 'n' roll – an inspiration to countless guitar players that emerged in the '80s and '90s, including Dimebag Darrell, Tom Morello, Kim Thayil of Soundgarden, and Stone Gossard and Mike McCready of Pearl Jam.

Ace's guitar wizardry is most powerfully illustrated in the songs he wrote and recorded with KISS in the '70s – *Cold Gin*, *Shock Me*, *Rocket Ride* and more. In 1978, when solo albums from the four members of KISS were released on the same day, it was Ace's record that rocked the hardest – and sold the most. And between his two tenures with KISS – the first from 1973 to 1982, the second from 1996 to 2002 – Ace has made some fine albums with his band Frehley's Comet and recently as a solo artist.

His new album, *10,000 Volts*, treads no new ground. But then again, an album by Ace Frehley – a dyed-in-the-wool '70s rocker – isn't meant for anyone expecting anything beyond his brand of guitar authenticity. The music on *10,000 Volts* is raucous; a throwback to his glory days with KISS, when his pyrotechnic on-stage solo showcase featured a rocket-firing guitar.

"Everyone who's heard the whole album seems to love it," Ace tells TG. "It's good to hear that people like what I'm doing. I'm getting positive feedback from almost everybody, so we'll see what happens."

As a player, his tone is unique, his technique unorthodox. As he says with a laugh: "I could never teach someone to play like me!" But there is still much we can learn from the man who has influenced so many famous players…

There's a great energy to this new album – you've still got it, Ace!

Well, thank you. I can't believe it; *10,000 Volts* was only out for two days, and it had 250,000 views on YouTube. I'm thrilled.

Your fans online are raving about *Back Into My Arms Again*, a song that dates to the '80s.

I was surprised because I didn't think anyone would remember it, but they did! I wrote that back in '84 or somewhere close to that. I always thought it was a good song, but for some reason I never decided to put it on any of my records. I might have used it for KISS back in the '90s if they had let me, but that's another story. It was just the right time… 40 years later!

Your songwriting process, like your guitar playing, seems off-the-cuff and in the moment.

You know, it's funny because I have an IQ of 163, which is genius-level. But there's a part of my day when I first wake up, and I'm still half asleep but also half awake, and that's when my most creative ideas pop up. It's like when I'm lucid, I get these ideas. When that happens, I need to pounce on them. But my process has always been to write things that are memorable.

Your tone is unmistakable. Where does that come from?

It's been the same since I was a teenager. I listened to all my favourite guitar players, who tended to be British Invasion guys like Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck… the list goes on. But as far as my tone, and the way I write my solos, I don't f*cking know! People tell me I'm so unique, but it's just a matter of me clearing my f*cking head and letting it rip!

So, there's no tried-and-true method to your madness?

If there was, I don't think I'd remember it! When you hear my solos, you know it's me, and you'll hear little bits and pieces of those guys I mentioned, but I could never teach someone to play like

Photo Getty

me. I don't think I'd want to! I'm a blues-based guitarist, like Jimmy Page, and that's how I look at my solos. I want them to be memorable. So, that was the approach – if there was one – on *10,000 Volts*. I want you to be able to sing along and have them get stuck in your head! The best guitar solo is a song within a song. I've been doing that my whole career. I couldn't stop or change even if I wanted to.

And with that, there is an element of devil-may-care sloppiness. That's not for everyone, but it works for you.
I'm a sloppy f*cking guitar player! I'll be the first to admit that. I make mistakes, and sh*t happens – especially live. I play the songs how they're meant to be played. I deliver the classic KISS songs and my solo songs how you remember them.

How do you feel about Tommy Thayer, the guitarist who replaced you in KISS?
A guy like Tommy Thayer – who I like and is a great player – will play perfectly with no mistakes. But is that what you want? Tommy will never be me, and no one can play like me. I take pride in that. That's rock 'n' roll.

Is your prescription for that sort of rock 'n' roll still a heaping dose of Gibson Les Paul's paired with Marshall amps?
My sound is as simple as that. I've got a ton of guitars, like Stratocasters, Telecasters, and all sorts of weird sh*t. I've got some great acoustic ones, too. I used a Strat on the new record for rhythm tracks and layering, but when it comes down to it, I'm most comfortable with a Les Paul. My sound is simple: a Gibson Les Paul dimed to ten, plugged into a vintage Marshall tube amp, also cranked to f*cking ten. But even if you do that, don't expect to sound like me!

What does it mean to make a record of this calibre at this stage in your career?
It's funny – if you play one of my songs to a random stranger who isn't a KISS fan and ask them, 'What do you think?', I bet you they'll say, 'Who is that guy? That's some cool sh*t!' But look, I'm 72 years old and still sound like I did in the '70s. I get a kick out of the fact that I can do this like I did then. Some will say the fact that my playing hasn't evolved is a problem, but I'd say that's bullsh*t. Ace Frehley fans seem to get it. I can go out there without bombs, makeup, and costumes. I'm in jeans and a t-shirt, playing like I did when I was 25. What do you think would happen if KISS tried that? They'd get booed off the stage!

CALLING CARD
"When you hear my solos, you know that it's me."

So many great guitarists have cited you as an influence – Tom Morello, Dimebag, and pretty much everyone from the grunge era. What does this mean to you?
I can't believe how many players I've influenced. People come up to me saying, 'If it wasn't for you…' That makes me feel great.

And is there one lesson you could pass on to TG readers?
In retrospect, I should have practised more. There are times I don't know what the f*ck I'm playing, but it just comes out alright anyway! I do my best work when I'm not thinking, when I just empty my head. I'll be fine if I know the key and have a few takes. What can I say? I know how to make a good song. There's no explaining it beyond that.
10,000 Volts is out in February.

"I'M A BLUES-BASED GUITARIST, LIKE JIMMY PAGE. I STILL SOUND LIKE I DID IN THE '70S!"

Photo Jayme Thornton

1 PENTATONIC REPEATS

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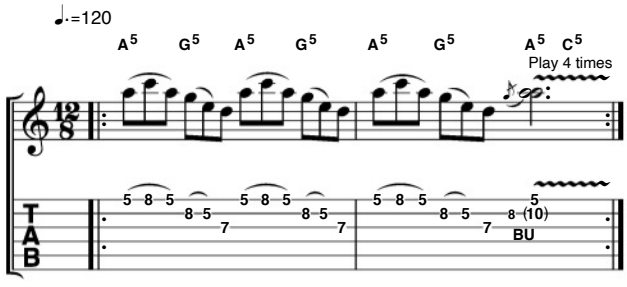

This classic Ace trick is based in the A minor pentatonic scale (A C D E G) and uses a repeating six-note pattern using hammer-ons and pull-offs with pick strokes to transition between strings. Finish the lick with a unison bend with vibrato using your first and third fingers.

2 DORIAN AND BLUES PHRASING

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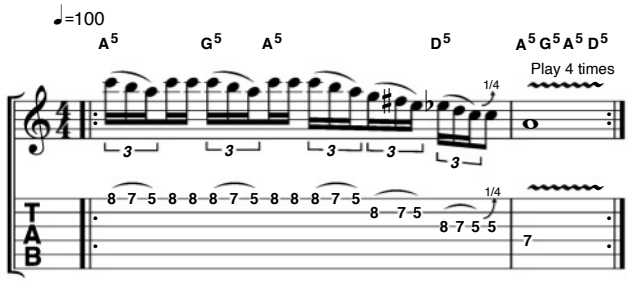

This lick is based in the A Dorian mode (A B C D E F♯ G) with an added bluesy ♭5 (E♭). Use your fourth, third and first fingers to pull off in quick succession before re-picking the starting note twice. Use pull-offs to descend the strings and finish with a quarter-tone bend and vibrato.

3 TRAVERSING THE FRETBOARD

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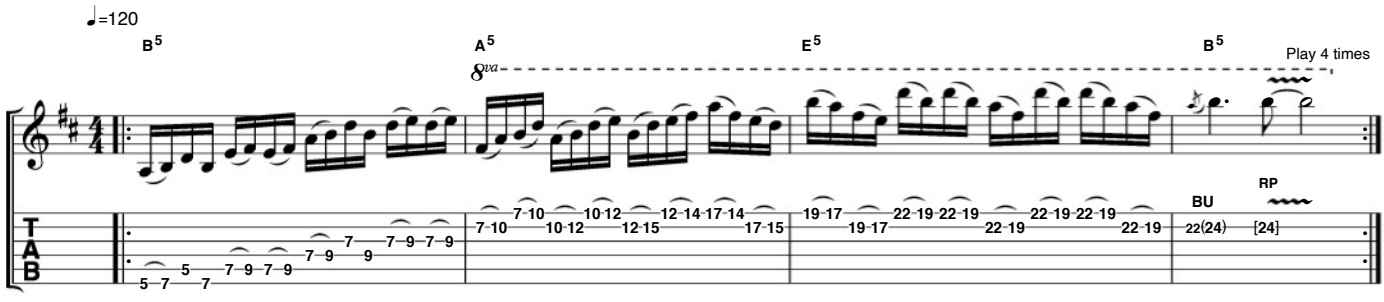


This B minor pentatonic (B D E F♯ A) lick spans various positions of the scale to ascend the fretboard. It can be played entirely with the first and third fingers, and keeping your touch light should make for quicker motion across the fretboard. Finish with a third finger bend, then re-pick and add vibrato.

Photo Getty

THE MORE THAT YOU TAKE

Words Ellie Rogers Portrait Tom Martin

"TAPPING IS THE MOST-USED WEAPON IN MY ARSENAL!"

Jon Gomm's tips for getting more out of your acoustic guitar

As one of the most innovative fingerstylists on the planet, Jon Gomm knows a thing or two about how to elevate the humble acoustic guitar to extraordinary heights. From beautiful tapestries of natural harmonics to frenzied eight-finger-tapping and brain-boggling feats of multitasking, there's no doubt about it: he's got the magic touch.

But it can be tricky to know where to begin if you want to move your playing on from open-tuned strum patterns and fingerpicking to a more progressive acoustic style. As Jon says: "Experimentation is the key. What's great about modern fingerstyle is that it really means: 'Pick up an acoustic guitar and do whatever techniques you want, in whatever genre you like.'" Jon has made an art of doing just that for the last two decades.

Whether you want to unlock a new tuning, start working on your percussive chops or simply choose the right guitar for the job, plunge into this treasure trove of tips and tricks and level-up your skills today.

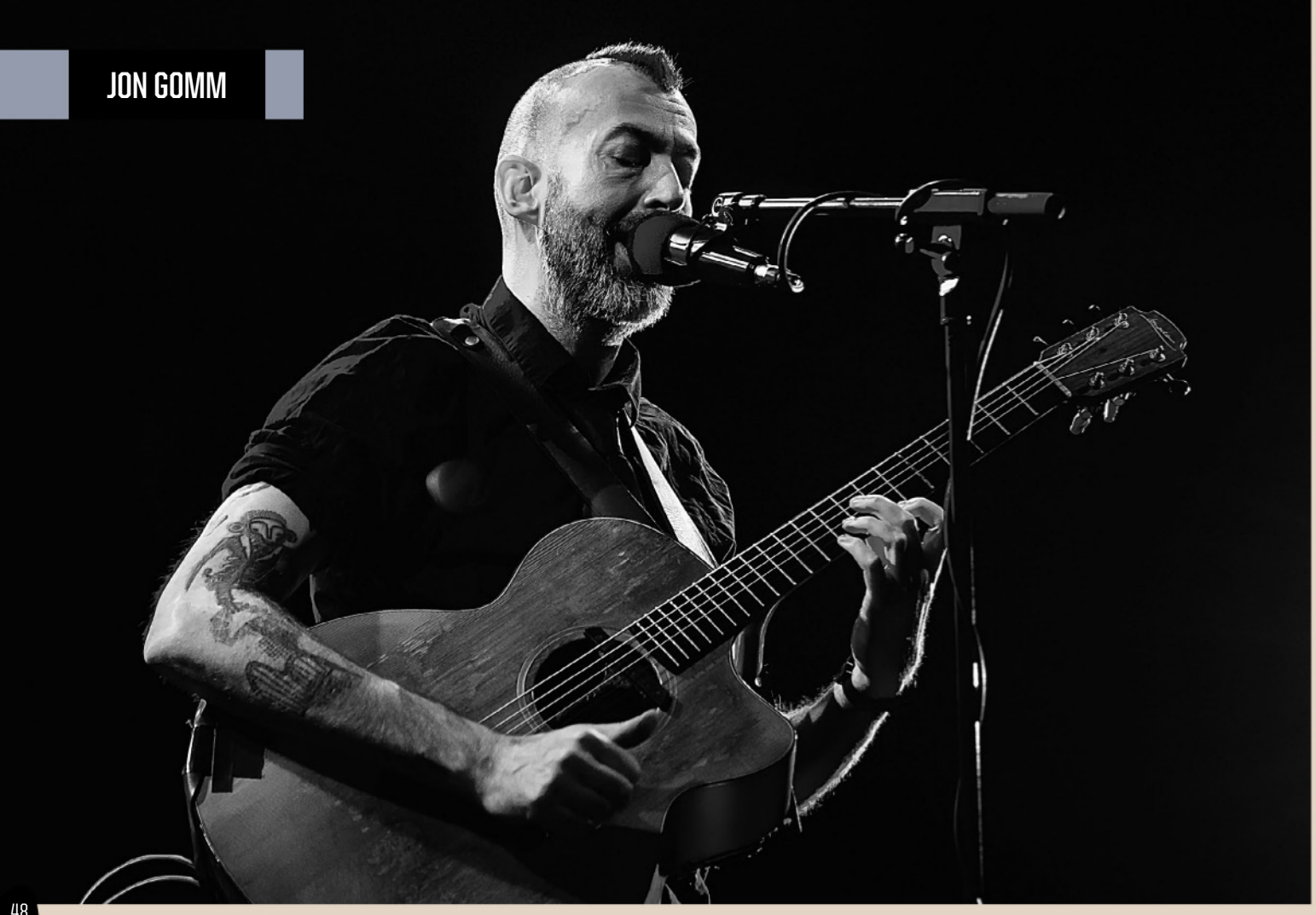
How would you describe your approach to the guitar?
I try to approach the guitar as if I've never seen one before, and don't have any preconceptions about how to make sounds with it. If you give a guitar to a little kid, the first thing they'll do is bang on it like a drum. At the same time, I've learned every technique and style I can, and try to mix them all up with no boundaries. It's a contradiction, but for me it's the best of all worlds. Acquire the broadest knowledge possible, then forget it all and express yourself.

What are a couple of the most essential techniques in your playing?
Tapping is the most-used weapon in my arsenal! To me, it sounds great on a steel-string acoustic guitar to hit out the notes with one hand, and it makes it possible to play multiple parts at once. Percussion is the other element. I think the acoustic guitar probably has more different drum sounds inside it than any actual percussion instrument. There's multiple different kicks, snares, toms and bongos, 'brushes', DJ scratches. All we're missing is the cymbals, but nobody really likes them anyway…

How would you say your tapping technique differs from what we see in the electric world and what advice do you have for improving that skill?
The difference is polyphony and range. On an electric guitar with a clean sound, it's totally possible to use tapping to play chords, or multiple parts, but even then, I don't think there's such a difference in timbre between bass notes and melodies, so as to fool the ear into thinking it's listening to multiple instruments. On acoustic guitar I can strum chords with one hand and play a solo by tapping with the other hand, as in my song *Until The Sun Destroys The Earth*. The most overlooked aspect of tapping technique is dynamics. It's all in the fingers – no volume controls! I like to practise playing one of my tapped riffs and fading it in, from the quietest possible volume to the loudest I can hit it, and back again, very slowly, as if going between 1 and 10 on the volume knob. There's much less texture in a tapped note than a plucked one, so you have to work harder to make it sound human and real.

How would you go about finding good kick and snare sounds on the body of an average acoustic guitar?
The kick drum will be on the loosest, lightest bit of your guitar, so it'll be on the top – aka soundboard – as far away from the edges as possible. Probably pretty near the bridge. You hit it with your wrist, flat, so it's a wide area of contact. A thud. The snare will be the tightest, most solid part of the guitar, such as a hand-clap against the side, or slapping the strings against the neck.

How hard do you hit the guitar?
Softly! Way softer than you probably imagine. For three reasons: Firstly, so you're less likely to break your guitar. Secondly, so you have a better tone to your drums. Thirdly, to keep the sound and the actual notes in balance.



BEAT IT
"The acoustic guitar has more different drum sounds inside it than any actual percussion instrument"

What exercises would you suggest for improving coordination, so as to be able to perform basslines, melodies and rhythms simultaneously?
Anyone can try this right now: create a rhythmically simple part for one hand, such as tapping some notes in continuous eighth notes or 16th notes with your left hand. Now write it down, in tab or notation. Next, come up with something a bit more rhythmically interesting for the right hand, like a simple drumbeat. Now write that down underneath your left-hand tab, marking where each drum hit falls in line with whichever particular left-hand note. Now piece it together with both hands, one moment of music at a time. Before long, you'll be fluent.

Most fingerstyle is performed using open tunings, and there are many to choose from. What entry-level favourites would you suggest for someone just venturing out of standard tuning?
I don't recommend just sneaking a string or two away from standard tuning. I recommend getting fully lost, by starting with a tuning with no relationship to standard tuning at all, and seeing what happens. So much great music has been written by people just physically exploring guitars by moving their fingers around to find chords and melodies. If you don't think you know enough about music theory to start composing, now you have no excuse to start writing! And, if you do know a bunch of theory, let's see if you really know it. Tune your guitar to B F# D F# A C# and write something in harmonic minor. That's the tuning and modality of my song *Universal Biology*. You'll have to rely on your ear and imagination, instead of your fingers just sleepwalking along pre-learned patterns. Having said all that, if you tune to DADGAD you'll have a lot of fun. Almost everything sounds wonderful, and there's a wealth of songs in this tuning you could learn.

Setting the tuning before you start playing is one thing, but you also incorporate live tuning adjustments into your melodies, as in the song *Cocoon*. Could you explain what you're doing and how you're doing it?
I play electric guitar, too. Just for fun these days, but I was very serious about it back in the day. I loved the whammy bar work of Jeff Beck, in particular. That true glissando of an open string or harmonic being bent and warped sounds so ethereal on guitar, so pure. So, when I saw Adrian Legg doing crazy tuning tricks to achieve similar sounds on acoustic guitar, I had to find out what the f*ck was going on. He uses special locking banjo tuners called Keith Tuners. I also had this idea that, using tapping, maybe I could use them to bend fretted notes as well as open

"ACQUIRE THE BROADEST KNOWLEDGE POSSIBLE, THEN FORGET IT ALL AND EXPRESS YOURSELF!"

Photos Elizabeth Gomm / Getty

strings. So I bought some, but they were expensive and I could only afford two. I put them on the treble strings, so I could use them for ghostly Beck-style melodies.

What qualities should someone look for in an acoustic guitar they intend to use for progressive fingerstyle?
The top should be strong but lightweight. I love 'thermo-aged' wood for this reason: the spruce – the most common wood for guitar tops – is baked in a kiln at a high temperature, so the moisture evaporates, leaving it lighter but without affecting its strength. The sound is like a 20 year-old guitar that's never been played – lower bass, and sparklier trebles. For complex fingerstyle and tapping techniques, a wider neck helps a lot. Not quite a classical width, but not far off. These are some of the ideas we incorporated into my Ibanez JGM signature, but there's loads more.

What gauge strings do you use and how regularly do you change them?
I use 14 to 68 gauge strings. They're massive. Basically, I climb up telegraph poles late at night, tear down the cabling with my bare hands and use that to string my guitar! Seriously, they're my signature gauge made by Newtone Strings. But I tune them very low, so the tension is actually less than medium gauge strings tuned to regular pitch. I love the bass I can achieve with this setup. Because they're so heavy and tuned pretty slack, I never break strings. I hate playing on brand new strings so I avoid changing them for as long as I can! But, when I'm touring, a five-gig maximum is my rule of thumb.

And what is your best tip for getting a good amplified acoustic guitar sound?
Combining pickups is the thing which will enable you to produce the range of sounds you hear in modern fingerstyle guitar music. Most players will use a transducer – usually affixed to the wood inside the guitar, rather than an 'undersaddle' pickup which can sound thin and fake – and an internal microphone, or a magnetic soundhole pickup and a mic, or some other combo. I like to use all three, and Fishman kindly designed a triple source system for the JGM guitars. All three elements do different jobs: one is more for the strings, one for percussion, and the other gets both but with an emphasis on the bass frequencies.

Words, guitars & backing Jon Bishop

THE 2024 GUITAR WORKOUT

Smash your new year guitar goals with our 30-day technical workout

This month we're going to flex our fingers and strain those steel strings in TG's 30-day guitar workout. Of course, guitar practice can be a thorny subject for some. Most of us took up guitar because of our love for music – and 'homework'-style practice may not be high on your wish list. So, here, we're tackling the challenge head-on with a jam-packed set of lessons that are both fun to play and guaranteed to help you improve your technique. You can either dip into the lessons as you wish, or, alternatively, you can let our practice plan guide you through the next 30 days. It's designed to be as flexible as possible so you can work towards your own playing goals. Grab your guitar, plug in and let's get started...

DAY 1

ASSESS YOUR PLAYING SKILLS

You'll get more out of any practice routine if you know which areas of your playing need most attention. Get started by taking an honest look...

1 CHECK YOU ARE PLAYING IN TIME

Choose a simple piece of music you know well and try playing in time with a metronome. Aim to synchronise onbeat notes with the click. If it doesn't seem fully aligned, you may need to work on your timing. Slow down a little and try to feel the rhythmic pulse more tightly.

2 HOW CLEAN ARE YOUR CHORDS?

Put your fingers in the wrong position and you'll end up with annoying fret buzz, so aim to play most chords using the very tips of your fingers as close to each fret as possible. Barre chords, of course, need a flat finger. Keep your thumb roughly opposite your fingers for maximum strength.

3 ARE YOU PLAYING TOO FAST?

You don't have to be a shredder to want to play fast. We've all tried to play a song at full speed before we've fully learnt it, usually resulting in fluffed chord changes and solo lines that don't quite link together. Play slowly to a metronome or drum beat and try to improve your speed by a small amount every day.

DAY 2

CHECK YOUR LEAD TECHNIQUES

There's always an optimum position for your hands to be in when you're playing lead guitar. Make sure you've got the techniques sorted...

STRING BENDS

For most first-, second- and third-finger bends place your thumb on the top side of the neck (sometimes called a 'baseball bat grip') for maximum strength. You may need to adjust position for fourth finger bends.

HAMMER-ONS AND PULL-OFFS

Can you play a pull-off as you lead out of the hammer-on (and vice versa)? If not, adjust your hand position. You'll need a firm thwack for a hammer-on, then a flick of the finger to pull off.

ALTERNATE PICKING

The ability to pick in a down-up 'alternate' pattern is crucial. To practise, choose one note and play it down-up-down-up in time with a metronome. If your timing is choppy or uneven, slow down.

ONE-FINGER-PER-FRET HAND POSITION

For the minor pentatonic scale, hand position isn't so crucial. If you want to play more complex tunes and solos you need all four fingers. Arrange the digits next to each other at consecutive frets.

B

DAY 3

IMPROVE YOUR RHYTHM SKILLS

Eight exercises to tighten up your rhythm

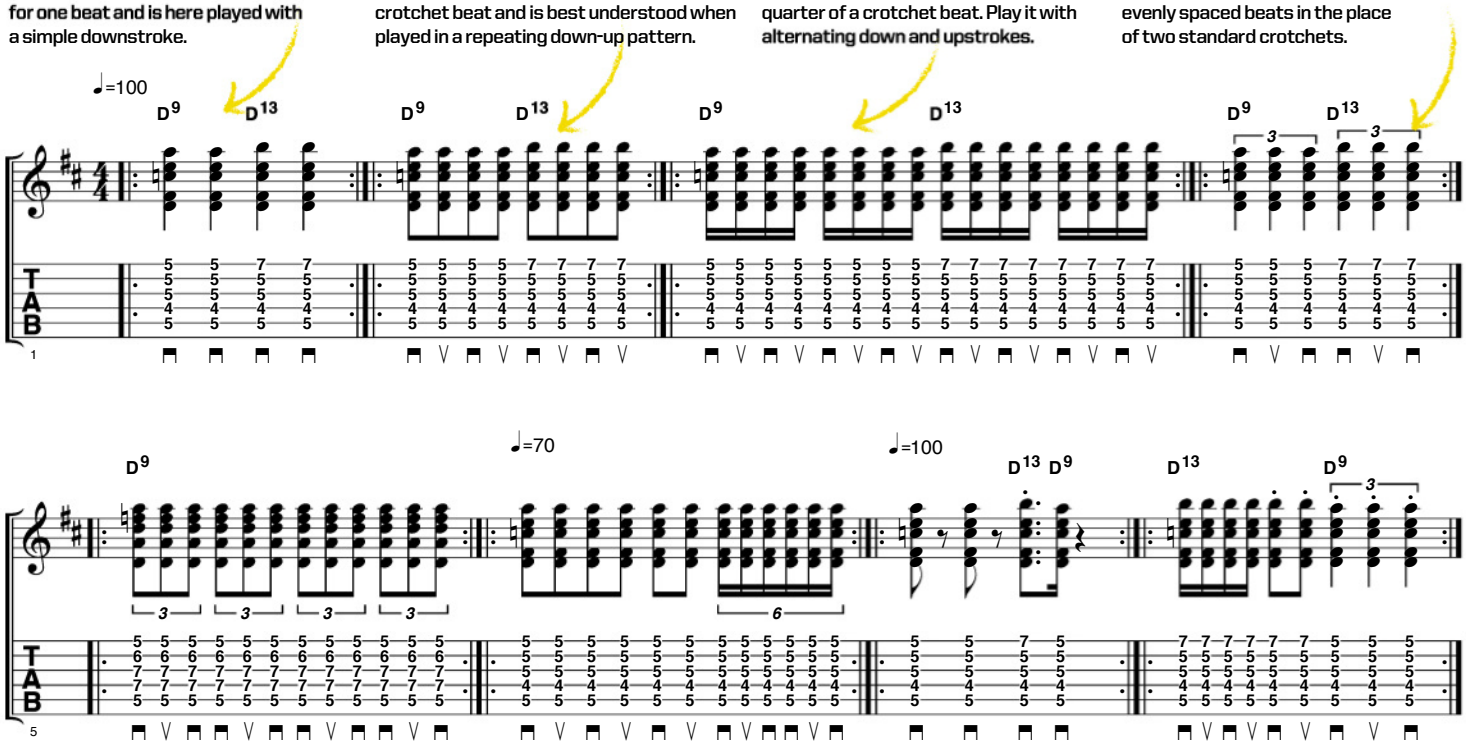
A solid rhythm feel is an essential ingredient of any musician's skill set. In day three we are going to break down some key rhythmic subdivisions so you can practise and master each one in isolation. To promote consistent delivery we've included the correct strumming directions, so try to stick to these even if they feel awkward at first. The pay off for all this hard work is two, fun to play examples designed to put your new skills to the test.

Bar 1
Crotchets
The crotchet (aka quarter note) lasts for one beat and is here played with a simple downstroke.

Bar 2
Quavers
The quaver (aka eighth note) lasts for half a crotchet beat and is best understood when played in a repeating down-up pattern.

Bar 3
Semiquavers
The semiquaver (aka 16th note) lasts for quarter of a crotchet beat. Play it with alternating down and upstrokes.

Bar 4
Crotchet triplets
The crotchet triplet places three evenly spaced beats in the place of two standard crotchets.



Bar 5
Quaver triplets
Another triplet here, but this time we fit three in the space of two standard eighth notes.

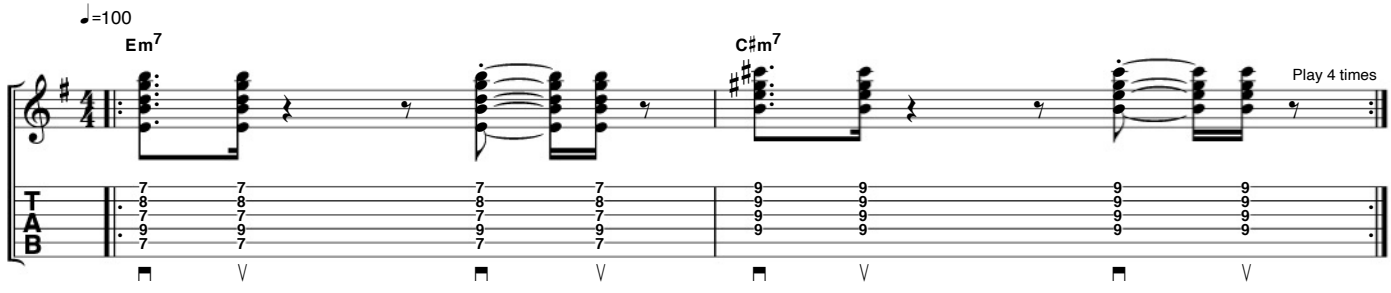
Bar 6
Semiquaver triplets
Again, three in the space of two – but this time with semiquavers. Our example alternates eighth notes with bursts of semiquaver triplets.

Bar 7
All the rhythms 1
Here we are combining the rhythms to create a simple funky part. The dot above the rhythms means to play the chords short and snappy.

Bar 8
All the rhythms 2
For this last example we're combining the semiquaver and triplet rhythms to create more complex-sounding part.

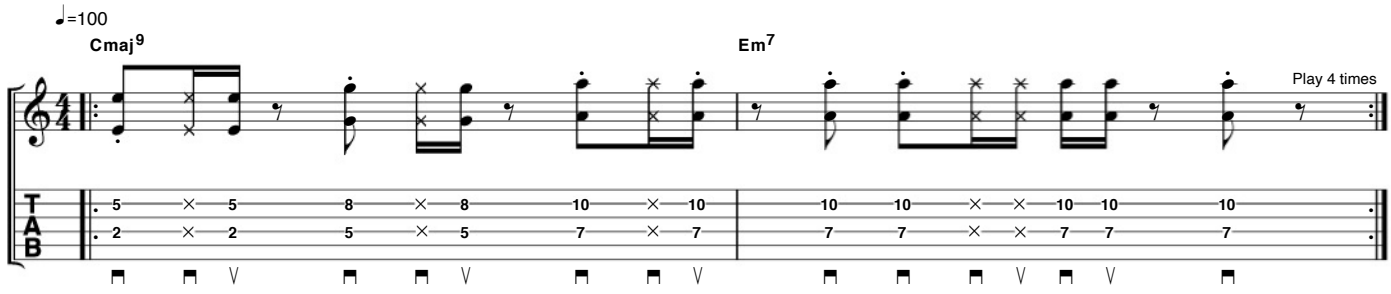
DAY 4

LIGHT FUNK RHYTHM bit.ly/tg380audio



We're keeping things light today with a couple of musical examples. Here, we're putting some easier rhythms together into a musical idea in the style of modern funk artists like Cory Wong and Vulfpeck. Check out the strumming directions and lock in with the backing track.

JAZZ-FUNK RIFF bit.ly/tg380audio



Our second example showcases the harder 16th note subdivision. The backing track provides an easy canvass for you to come up with parts of your own. Simply use our octave fingerings and add any of the rhythms we have worked on so far.

DAY 5

C

IMPROVE YOUR EAR FOR HARMONY

Today is all about working on your musical ear. For each exercise you will hear three strummed chords, followed by those same chords played in a different order. It's your job to identify each chord type and the order they are played in the second time. The answers are printed upside down at the bottom of p60.

TEST 1
BASIC CHORDS

- **D major**
  Listen out for the typically positive, happy sound of the major chord.
- **D minor**
  The opposite of major, minor chords have a sad, melancholy flavour.
- **D5**
  The powerchord has a stable sound, without the emotional character of major or minor.

TEST 2
7TH CHORDS

- **Dmaj7**
  The major 7 has a very mellow and laid-back sound.
- **Dm7**
  The minor 7 is more reflective, but not as sad as the minor chord.
- **D7**
  The "dominant" 7 chord has an edgy, bluesy sound.

FIND THE ANSWERS ON P60

TEST 3
SUS CHORDS

- **Dsus4**
  The sus4 chord sounds suspenseful and like it wants to resolve.
- **Dsus2**
  The sus2 chord sounds strong, but more colourful than the powerchord.
- **D7sus4**
  Harmonically more complex than other sus chords. Slightly mournful.

TEST 4
UNUSUAL CHORDS

- **Dm7♭5**
  The m7♭5 chord has a dissonant sound and is the same as the minor 7 chord only with a ♭5th.
- **Ddim7**
  Jazzy and mysterious. Useful as a chromatic passing chord between major, minor and 7th chords.
- **Dm6**
  Another jazzy chord, this time with an almost scary vibe. Easier to jam to than a dim7, though.

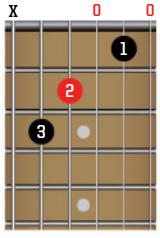
MASTER THE FRETBOARD WITH CHORDS

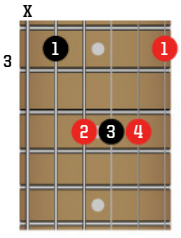
Ride the road to fretboard mastery and learn some cool new chords along the way

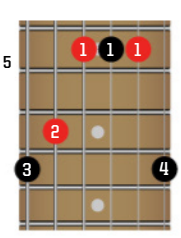
A great all-round rhythm player needs really good chord knowledge. There are two ways to develop this part of your playing. The first is simply to learn some new chords – and this is fun, a journey of discovery with new sounds and moods. The other method is to learn how chords link together when played in various positions on the fretboard. It's known as the CAGED system, because you'll be looking at C, A, G, E and, yep, you guessed it, D chord shapes. Get to grips with it and you'll soon be playing the best riffs and rhythm parts ever, as you navigate the whole fretboard in the process. Read on and we'll show you more...

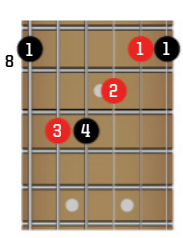
DAY 6 MAJOR CHORDS

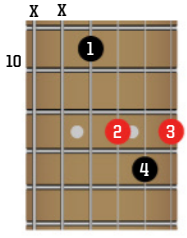
We start here with five C chords, including the good old open shape. Your task is to see how they link together across the fretboard. The first barre chord shares the root note with open C. This resembles an open A chord, so it gets called an "A shape" even though it could be any pitch – C here, of course. Play the chords one after the other, then see if any ideas come to mind.


C (C shape)


C (A shape)

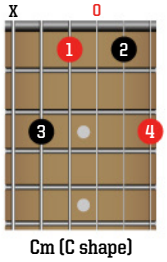

C (G shape)

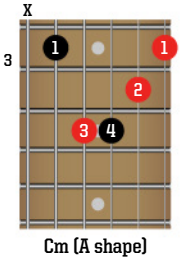

C (E shape)

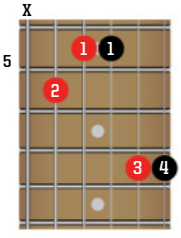

C (D shape)

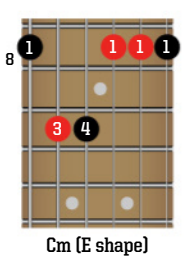
DAY 7 MINOR CHORDS

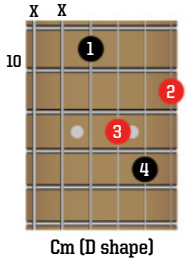
Once again, the idea is to see where these chords share notes – the idea being that you could create cool rhythm parts across the entire fretboard. Though a couple of these shapes are tough to play, it's still useful to see how they link together. And there's nothing to stop you playing an easier "partial" version – just fret three strings instead of the full shapes.


Cm (C shape)


Cm (A shape)

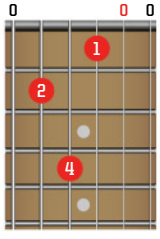

Cm/B♭ (G shape)

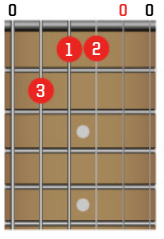

Cm (E shape)

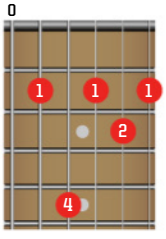

Cm (D shape)

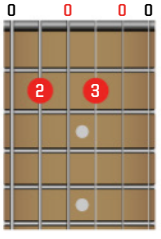
DAY 8 E SHAPE CHORDS

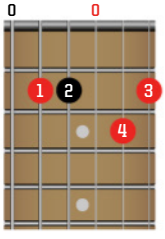
Here we'll turn our attention to fresh sounds, in particular, some variations on the open E chord we all know. Try them out in open position, then see if you can make them work as closed position barre chords.


Eadd9


Emaj7

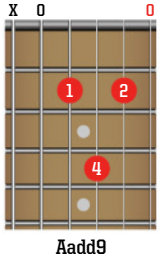

Em11

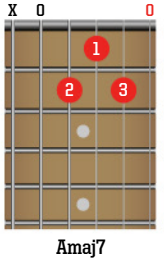

E7sus4

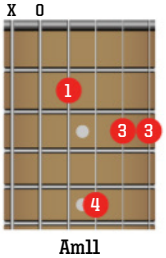

Em9

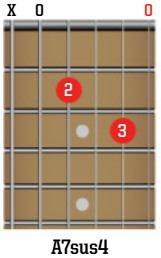
DAY 9 A SHAPE CHORDS

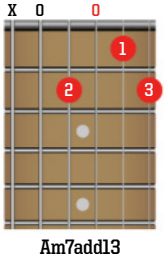
Today we're doing the same as yesterday, but with the open A chord as our starting point. Once again, try out the chords in open position and choose your favourites. If you can also make them work as barre chords you're acing it!


Aadd9


Amaj7

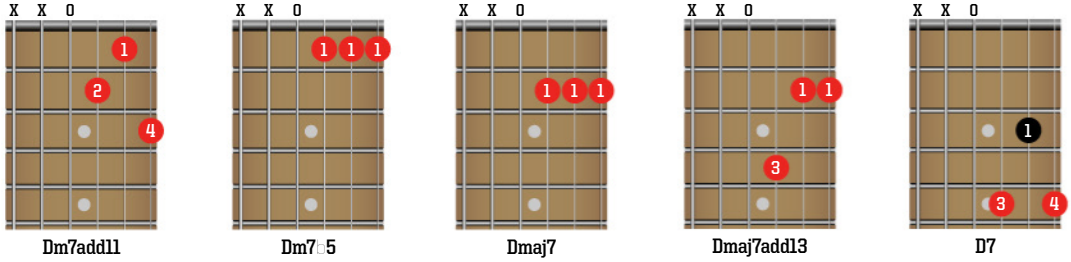

Am11


A7sus4


Am7add13

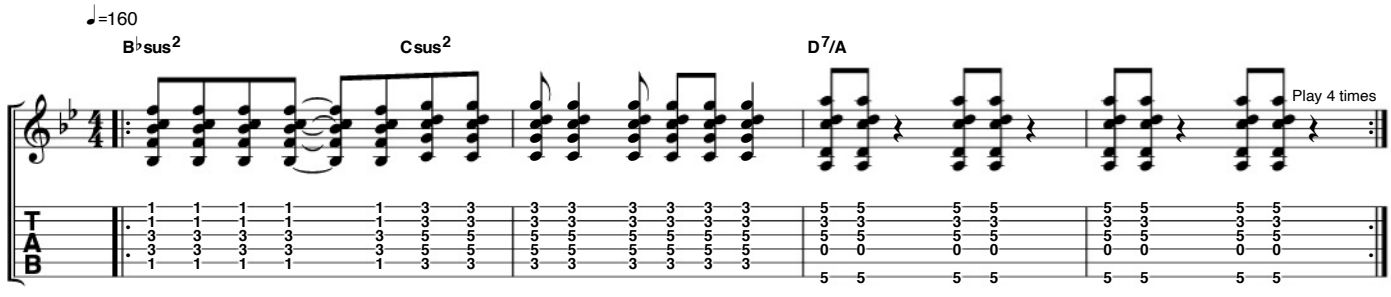
DAY 10 D SHAPE CHORDS

One more time! Here we're looking at some creative variations on the humble open D chord. Some of these can be tricky when played as barres, so take it slow and focus on accurate fretting before any changes.



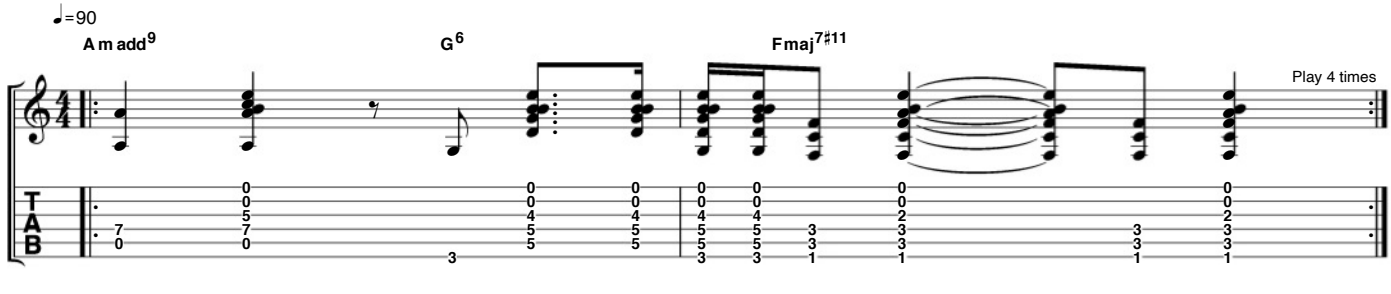
DAY 11

FOO FIGHTERS-STYLE SUS CHORDS bit.ly/tg380audio



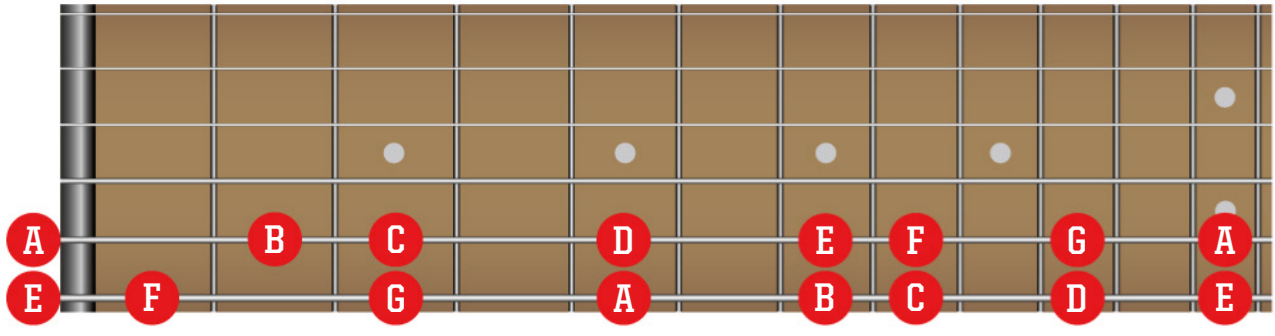
The sus2 chord we're using here sounds great with a light overdrive and provides a contrast when followed by some dissonant sounding stabs. The D7/A chord we used for the stabs is a bit of a Dave Grohl favourite!

CHORDS WITH OPEN STRINGS bit.ly/tg380audio



This part uses the open string to create a lush, ringing sound with plenty of sustain. Incorporating the open strings into pretty basic fingerings is an easy way to generate more harmonically rich sounding chords.

DAY 12 LEARN THE BASS-STRING ROOT NOTES



It's pretty tricky to remember all the notes on the neck at first, so here we're looking at just the natural notes (no sharps or flats) on the two bass strings. Try these two exercises to help you memorise them.

1 Play the notes on each string, saying the note names out loud as you go.
2 Play a barre chord using each note shown as your root.

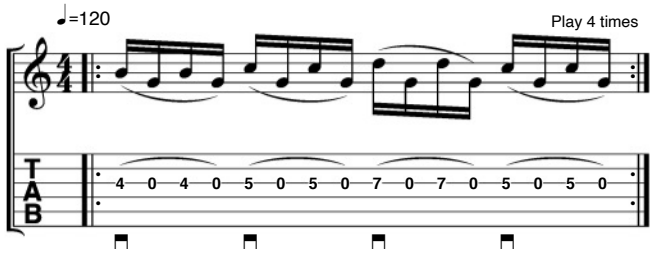
F

DEVELOP YOUR LEAD PLAYING

Work on basic techniques, then increase your speed and your solos will soar!

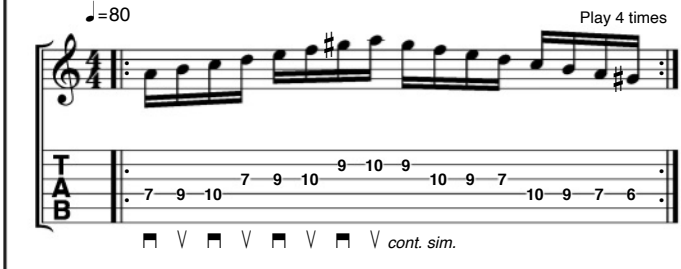
Whether you're an aspiring shredder or you prefer to navigate your solos by feel, every player can improve their technical skills. Work on simple, repeatable ideas and you can take a relaxed approach to guitar practice and you're guaranteed to see results. Here, we're taking a look at a mix of standard lead guitar techniques employed in solos of all genres. Each exercise is a short idea which you can widdle away at without really thinking about it. If you want to take things up a step, try pushing the tempo up higher along with a metronome. Spend a few minutes a day on each one.

HAMMER-ONS AND PULL-OFFS bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 13 The open third string makes this an easy exercise to get started with. Experiment by fretting with different fingers. As you progress you can move the idea to other parts of the fretboard and onto other strings.

ALTERNATE PICKING bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 14 Our alternate picking exercise addresses the issue of crossing strings and using the pinky for fretting. The constant down-up picking can be tough, so focus on short three- or four-note fragments to make it easier.

SYNCING PICKING AND LEGATO

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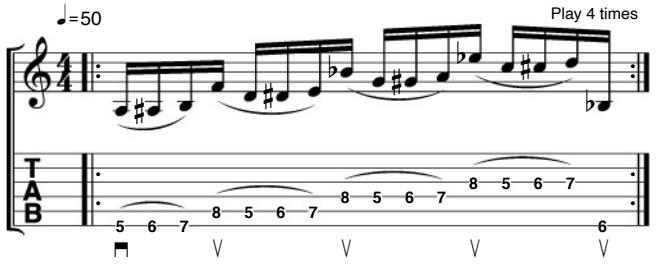

DAY 15 Our chromatic exercise is a simple pattern that works on picking, hammer-ons and pull-offs. This pattern can be adapted to move across all the strings and can be used to both ascend and descend the neck.

ONE-TONE BEND WITH A REFERENCE PITCH

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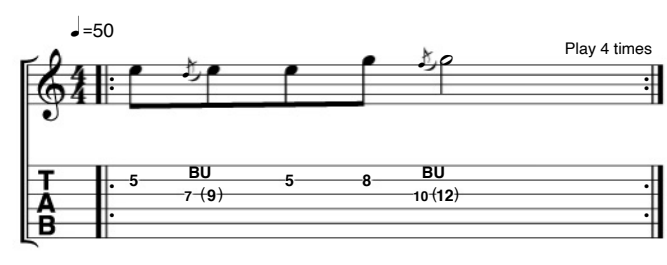

DAY 16 Aiming for a target pitch is a good way to ensure good string-bending intonation. This exercise works on a one-tone bend in two places on the fretboard. Be sure to adapt this idea to practise on other strings.

PITCHED WHAMMY BAR BENDS

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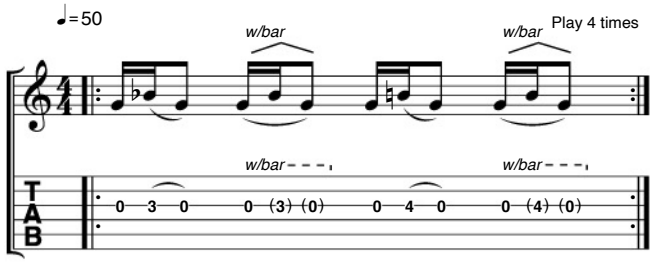

DAY 17 Guitarists like Jeff Beck and Steve Vai are masters of playing melodies with the whammy bar. As with string-bending it's good practice to take a target pitch and practise either scooping up or dooping down to it.

TRILLS

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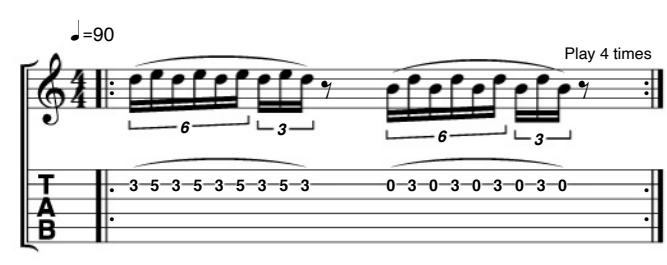

DAY 18 If you can manage the tight timing here then the generally looser technique of trilling should feel a whole lot easier. Treat it as two exercises: the first half using two fingers, and the second part using just one digit.

PINCHED HARMONICS EXERCISE

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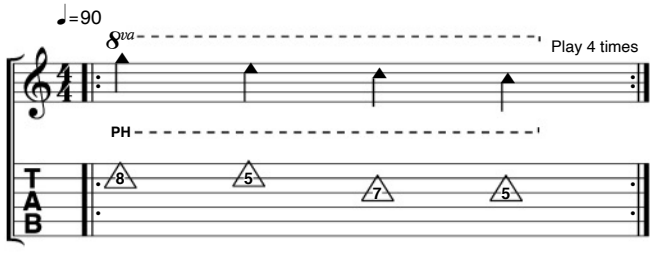

DAY 19 As you pick the string, let the flesh of the thumb that is holding the pick touch the string on the way through to release the harmonic. Try to pick 12 or 24 frets higher than the fretted note for the best harmonic.

TAPPING RUNS

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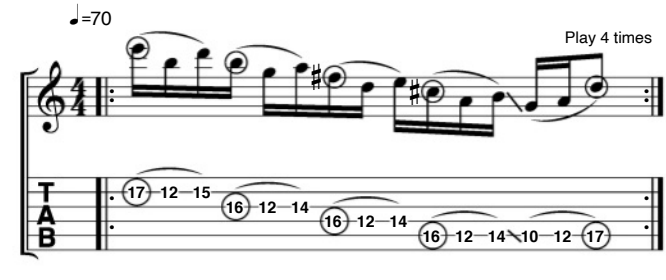

DAY 20 Eddie Van Halen and Nuno Bettencourt are masters of melodic tapping. Our example uses the minor pentatonic scale to create a flowing run. Make sure to start slow, focusing on steady, even timing.

COMBINING TECHNIQUES

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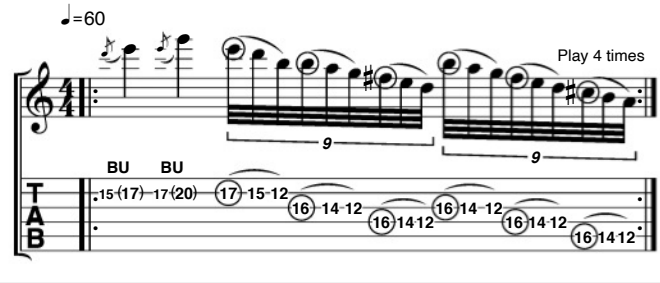


DAY 21 Here we're working on combining various techniques in one lick. We start out with some string bends and then finish off with a tapping run. After getting this down why not combine two of your favourite techniques?

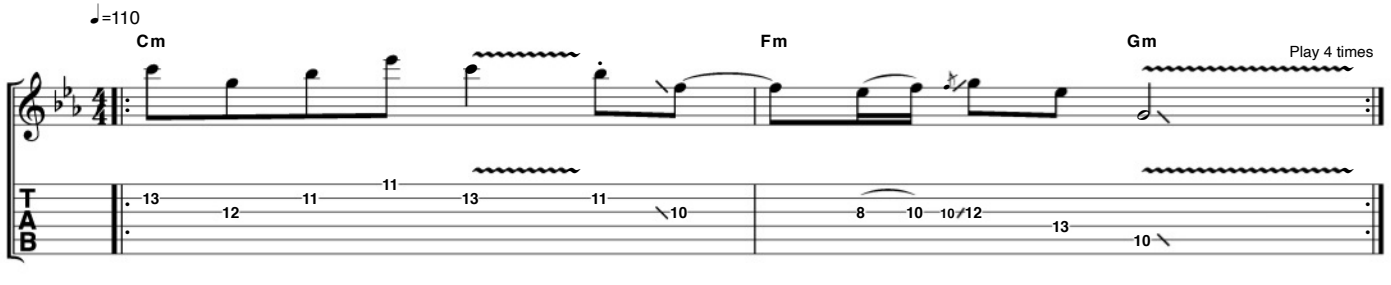
MIX AND MATCH NOTES AND PHRASES FROM EACH EXAMPLE FOR A REAL-WORLD WORKOUT

GET BETTER AT IMPROVISING

Try these improv exercises and shine at your next jam

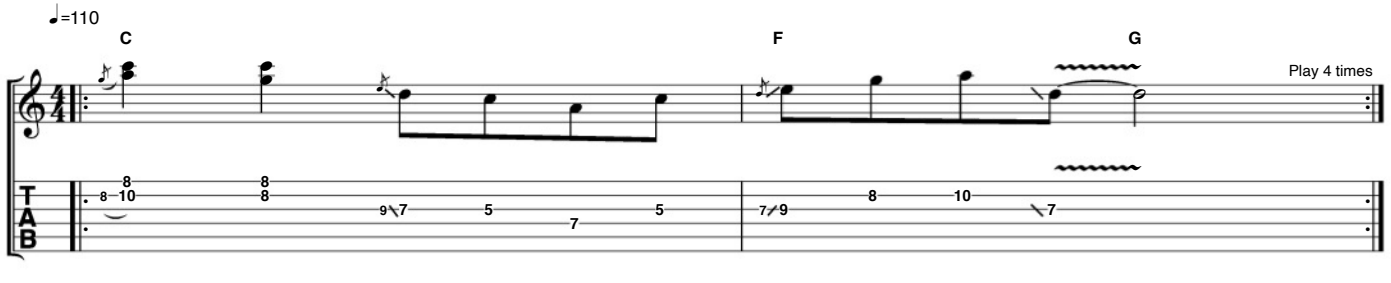
Whether you play in a band, jam with backing tracks or you prefer to improvise unaccompanied, ad libbing is another of those continuous and unending quests. That doesn't mean you can't get a whole lot better at it, though! Here, we're looking at a few strategies to help you develop your improv skills so you'll be 100 per cent ready when your next jam session comes around.

USING ONE SCALE #1 bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 22 The chords used for the backing music come from the same key: C minor. This means you can use just one scale (C minor pentatonic) and your ear for music to navigate the progression. It's a staple approach in simple blues progressions.

USING ONE SCALE #2 bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 23 Again, all of the chords are diatonic here (this time from the key of C major) so we can use the C major pentatonic scale for the whole solo. Guitarists like Brian May and Slash are masters of making major key solos sound good.

PHRASING AROUND ROOT NOTES

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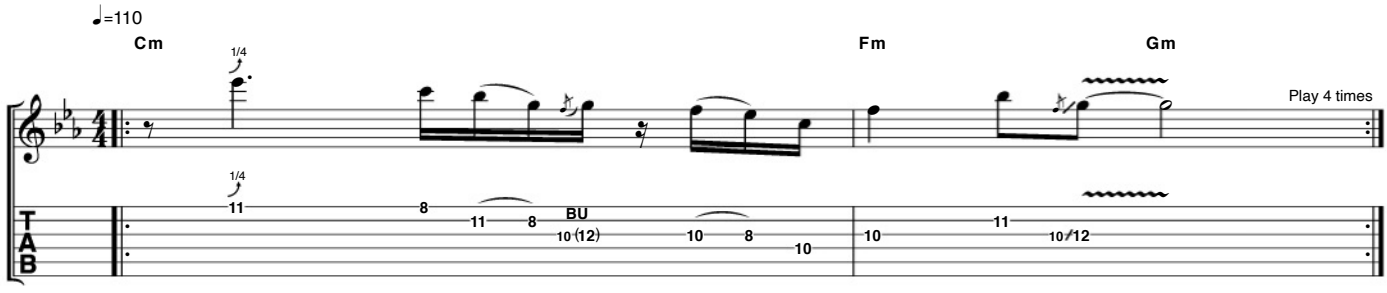

DAY 24 Targeting the root note of the chords is a good way to outline the harmony as it passes. Here, we approach linking the root notes together with finger slides to provide more interest.

USING RHYTHM IN YOUR SOLOS

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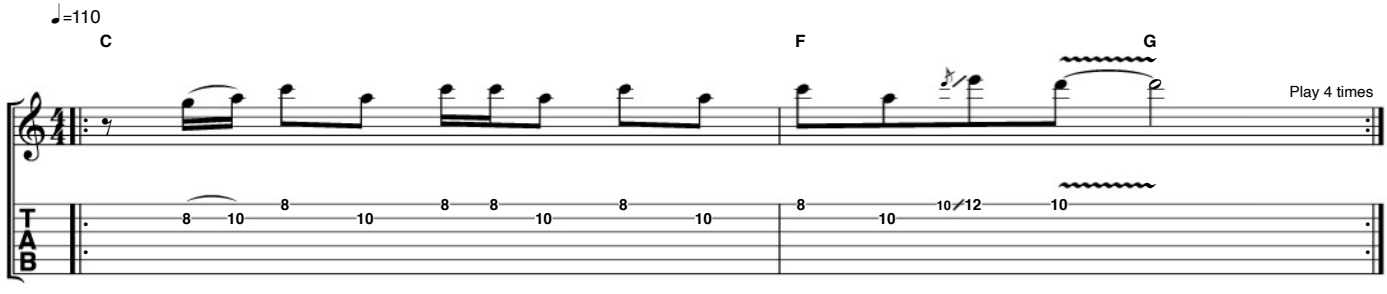

DAY 25 In this lick we get away with playing only a handful of notes as the rhythm is interesting. Rhythm is one of the most important aspects of a solo, and even a one-note solo can be memorable if a good rhythm is used.

POSITION SHIFT LICK

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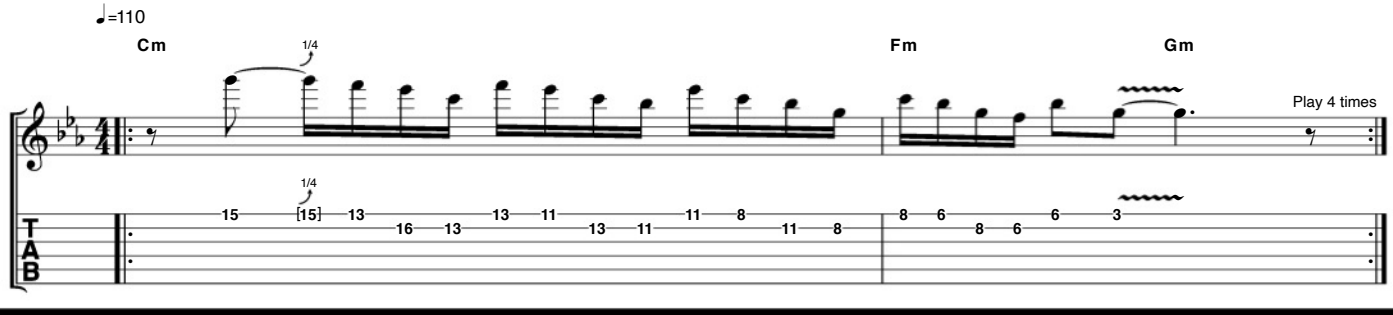


DAY 26 Here, we move down through the pentatonic box shapes. Using position shifts allows you to recycle and rework each melodic lick, making only small adjustments to allow for the new shape.

IMPROVED IMPROVS...

Three ideas for your next jam session

1 ONE-NOTE JAM

Okay, staying on one note might not sound like a recipe for a world class solo, but, by ditching all the other notes, you can focus on rhythm and how loud or soft to play.

2 ONE-STRING JAM

Confine yourself to one string and you'll free yourself from predictable scale box patterns and start thinking more melodically. Give it a try!

3 CHOOSE FIVE RANDOM NOTES...

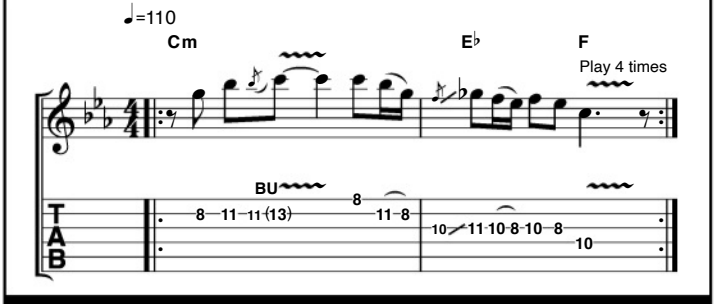
...and use only those five! Okay, it could be four notes, six, seven, or however many, but improvising with a restricted set of notes will ensure creative new ideas.

CREATIVE SOLOING

Turn your attention to the more musical side of lead guitar with four ways to develop a solo

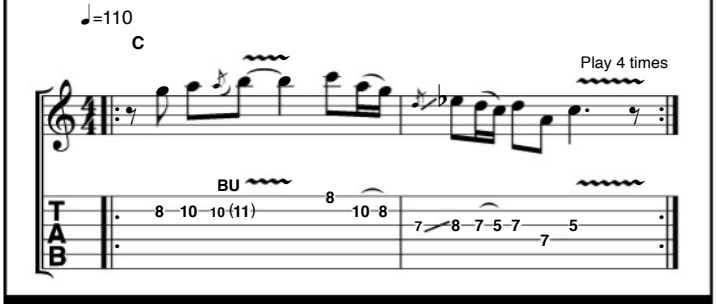
Yes, yes, we *are* aware we've just been looking at improvising solos and that "creative soloing" might appear to be just a little bit similar... but bear with us. This next idea takes you a step further. Think of it as a more developed approach to improv if you like, but it's also something to employ when writing longer solos. Here, we're going to take a basic C minor pentatonic lick and demonstrate three ways you could adapt the idea to take it somewhere new. Recycling ideas and globalising concepts is a great way to maximise your vocabulary and make sure your solos always sound like they're going somewhere.

THE BASIC LICK bit.ly/tg380audio



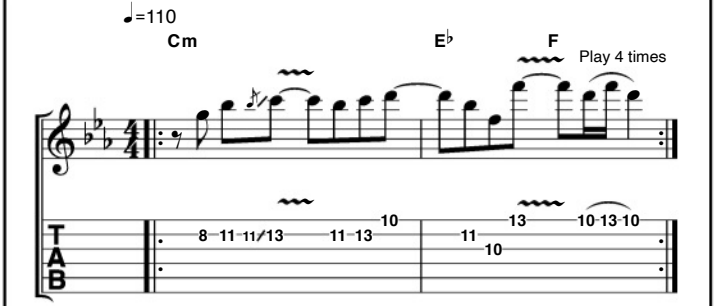
DAY 27 This is our basic lick. It uses the C minor pentatonic scale and has a simple, memorable melody. The use of string bends and finger slides helps to bring the idea to life.

CHANGING THE HARMONIC CONTEXT bit.ly/tg380audio



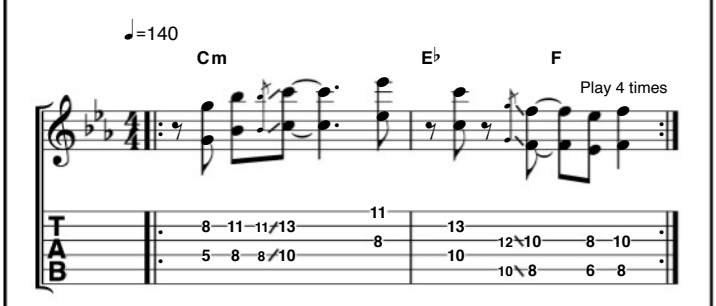
DAY 28 If we move our basic lick down three frets a C major pentatonic version can be produced. Blues guitarists are fond of shifting licks around to make major versions with ease.

ADD IN TARGET NOTES bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 29 We can add in target tones and flavour notes in to spice up our basic lick. Here we are adding a D note. This D doesn't appear in the C minor pentatonic scale, but it sounds great.

CHANGING STYLE bit.ly/tg380audio



DAY 30 With a change of tone and phrasing we can adapt the basic lick to fit other styles of music. Here we're using octaves and a neck pickup to beef up the sound. Use downward thumb strokes to get a jazz-style delivery.

EAR TEST ANSWERS
TEST 1 Dm · D5 · D
TEST 2 Dm7 · Dmaj7 · D7
TEST 3 Dsus2 · D7sus4 · Dsus4
TEST 4: Ddim7 · Dm7♭5 · Dm6

Week 1

1. Day 1: try out all of the exercises in the feature
2. Daily practice: play the five or 10 easiest exercises from the feature
3. Day 7: play through all the exercises in the feature again

Take it fairly easy during week 1. You may not be able to play all the examples, so don't worry about it. Focus most of your time on the easiest riffs, licks and exercises as well as the ones you enjoy the most. Don't neglect your existing repertoire either. If you're playing for an hour, then 15 to 20 minutes on a technical workout is as much as you need.

Week 2

1. Day 1: try out all of the exercises in the feature
2. Daily practice: aim to increase speed and accuracy on week 1's chosen exercises
3. Introduce five to 10 new exercises into your daily routine

Your aim this week is to upscale your efforts from week 1. Not in terms of how long you play for (unless you want to), but in terms of accuracy, quality and speed. If you're focusing on chord vocabulary, ear training or similar, then you should be seeing improvements here. Start to introduce some of the more challenging exercises, too.

30-DAY PLAN

You've tried all our exercises, now structure your practice time with our planner

Hopefully by now you've read through the feature and had a look at most of our lessons. Now, it's time to think about how to use the examples over the coming days and weeks so that you see steady improvements in your playing. Here, we're focusing on general improvement over the first three weeks, then homing in on more specific goals in week four. Feel free to adjust this flexible plan according to your own interests and playing goals.

Week 3

1. Day 1: try out all of the exercises in the feature
2. Daily practice: increase speed and accuracy on week 1 & 2's exercises
3. Introduce the remaining exercises from the feature

Once again, this week your aim is to improve on the exercises you've been focusing on so far and to introduce anything you haven't tried. Jam along to our backing tracks or practise with a metronome or drum machine – either way, starting slowly and increasing the tempo in small steps is the key to sustained improvement.

Week 4

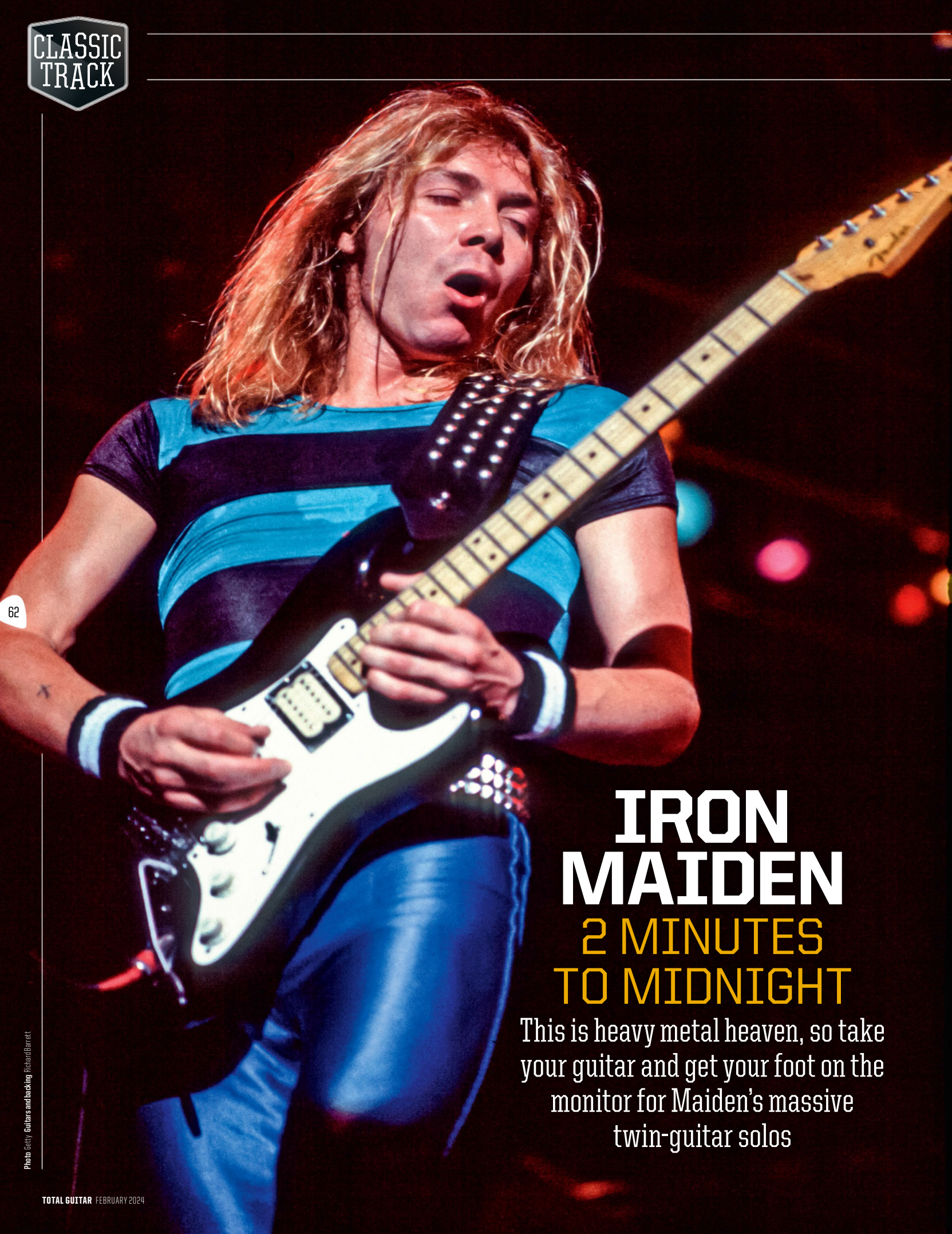
1. Daily practice: play the hardest exercises from the feature
2. General technique: sections A, B and F
3. Rhythm guitar: sections B, C, D and E
4. Lead guitar: sections E, F, G and H

Time to change tack. Ditch the easiest exercises – hopefully they're too easy for you by now. And dropping them in favour of more challenging material will help you continue to improve. Double down on your playing goals this week, too. If you want to improve your soloing then pay most attention to our lead guitar sections.

Days 29-30

1. Get creative! Mix and match from the feature
2. Test yourself

Try mixing up, say, alternate picking with pinched harmonics, or trills with tapping. Alternatively, try switching between rhythm and lead exercises, or rewriting one of our rhythm examples with some new chords. As you free yourself from the stricter practice of following tab you should find that the creative ideas begin to flow. Finally, test yourself on any areas you struggled with.



IRON MAIDEN

2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

This is heavy metal heaven, so take your guitar and get your foot on the monitor for Maiden's massive twin-guitar solos

Photo Getty **Guitars and backing** Richard Barrett

SOUND ADVICE

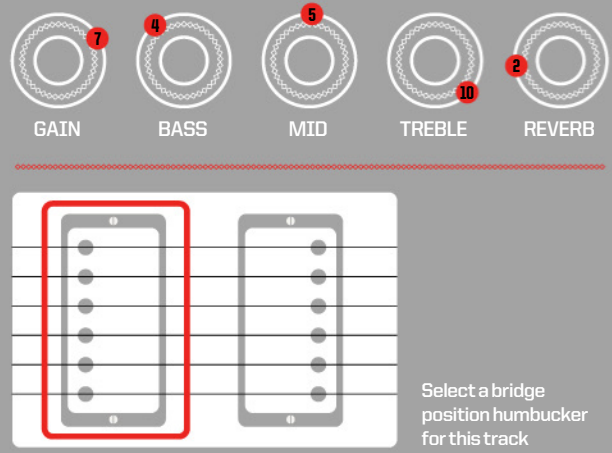
Everything you need to know before playing *2 Minutes to Midnight*

Appearing on Maiden's 1984 album *Powerslave*, *Two Minutes To Midnight* features high-energy riffing, half-time head-nodding and even the occasional harmonised twin-lead moment courtesy of guitarists Dave Murray and Adrian Smith. If you should happen to play with two other guitarists, we suggest one of you plays chords while the other two trade riffs and lead licks.

When it comes to the solos, you'll be playing a mixture of picked and legato runs, plus fairly aggressive whammy bar lines, so your playing will need to be as tight as Murray and Smith's spandex circa 1984. With a long solo section such as this, it can be easier to learn a few choice licks and improvise some of your own. Make sure to follow the tab in those harmonised parts, though.

GET THE TONE

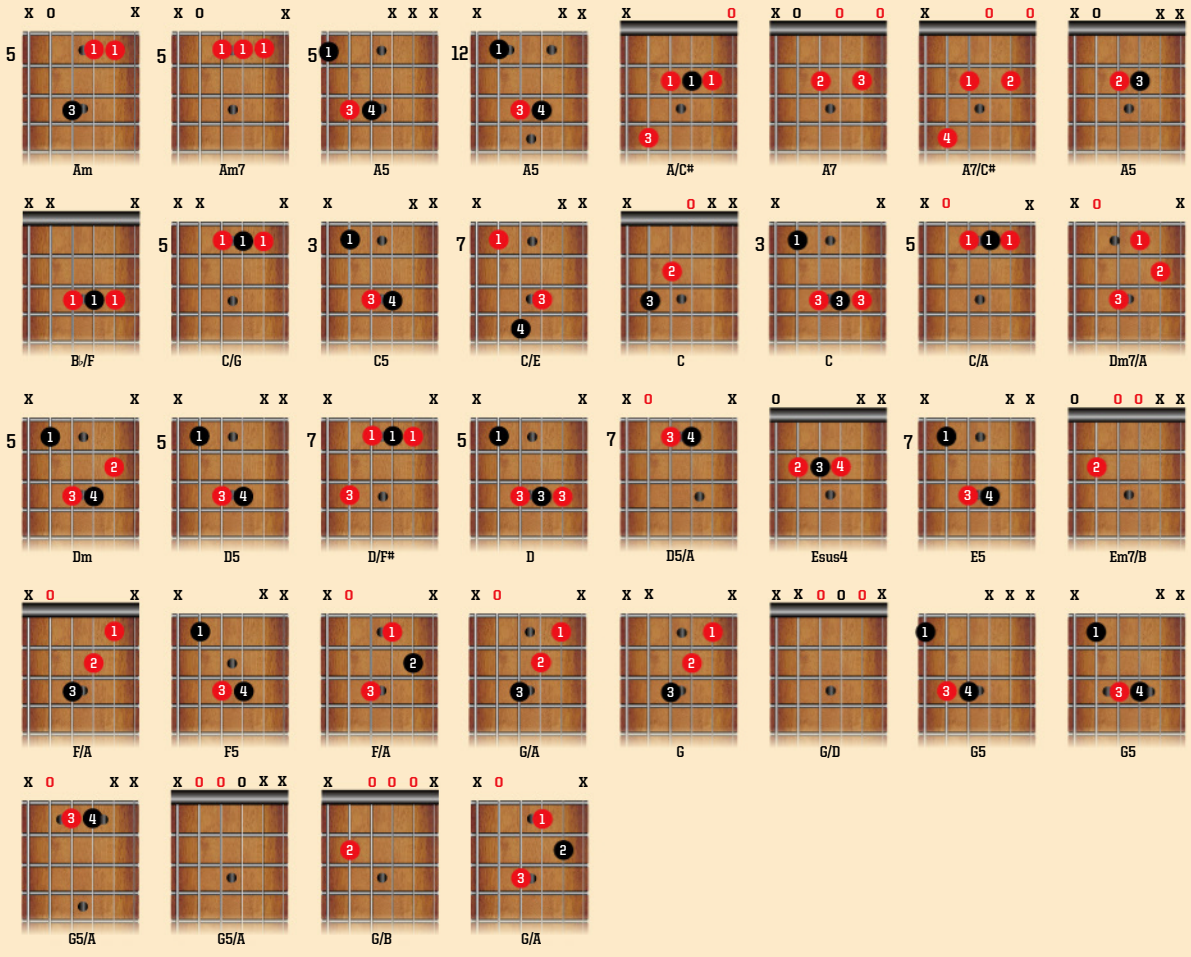
CHANNEL OVERDRIVE



Dave Murray and Adrian Smith use various guitars when playing this track live, usually either Fender or Jackson Superstrats equipped with humbucker pickups (including DiMarzio Super Distortions and Seymour Duncan Hot Rails). High-output humbuckers are the name of the game, then, and a locking vibrato unit is essential if you want to play Murray's solo note for note. If your rig includes digital amp emulations, opt for a Marshall Plexi model. Smith often uses a wah pedal during live performances of his solo.

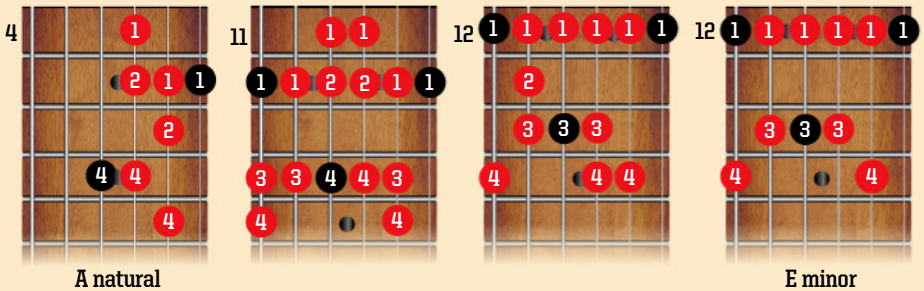
CHORDS

It's easier to visualise the main intro/verse riff as a run of single notes over the open fifth string rather than as two-note chords – trying to name all those diads is a hassle you just don't need! We've written 'Am7' over the tab in these sections to give a general indicator of the harmony. In the rest of the track, a mixture of powerchords (chords formed of a root note, a 5th and a high octave note) and 'slash' chords (a chord whose lowest note isn't its root) are used.



SCALES

Murray's solo is in A minor, and he sticks with the A natural minor scale (A B C D E F G) throughout the section. There's a key change to E minor in the second solo and Smith opts for the E Dorian scale (E F# G A B C# D) so that the C# notes in his licks match up with the C# note in the occasional A chord (A C# E). The run in bar 4 of Smith's solo hints at the E blues scale (E G A B♭ B D), and the lick starting in bar 13 uses the E minor pentatonic scale (E G A B D).



A natural minor scale | E Dorian mode | E blues scale | E minor pentatonic scale

IRON MAIDEN
2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

FULL TAB

2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT
Music & Lyrics by Bruce Dickinson, Adrian Smith.
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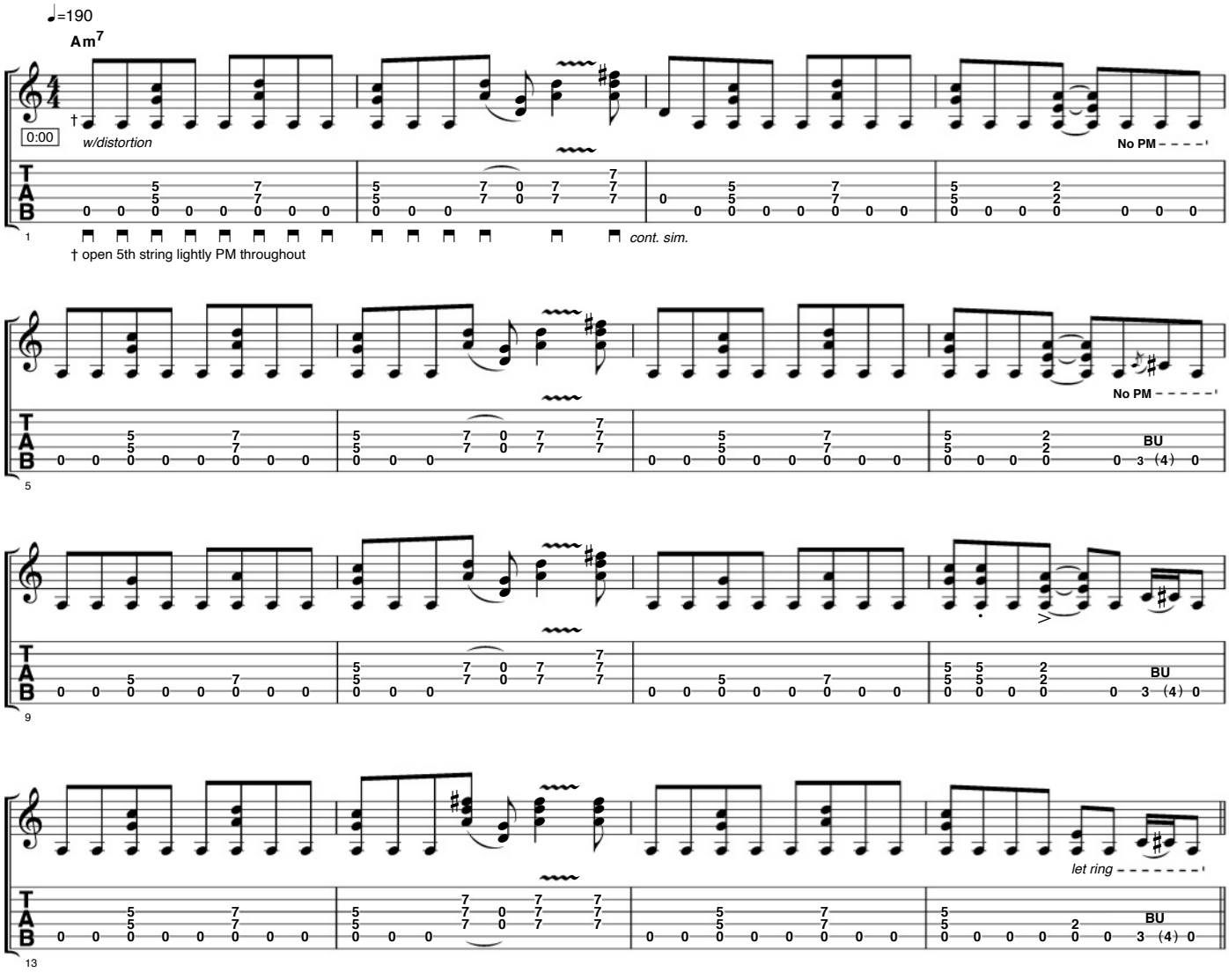
IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Intro **bit.ly/tg380audio**

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Intro

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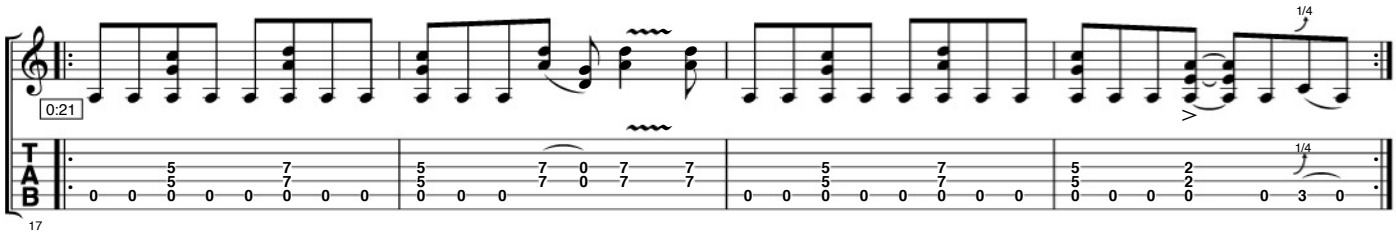
Essentially, there are only four bars of music here, but with a few simple variations on each repeat. The riff sounds best when it is down-picked. Resist the urge to pick too energetically – keeping your picking movements small and efficient will help you nail the timing at a monster 190bpm tempo.

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Verse

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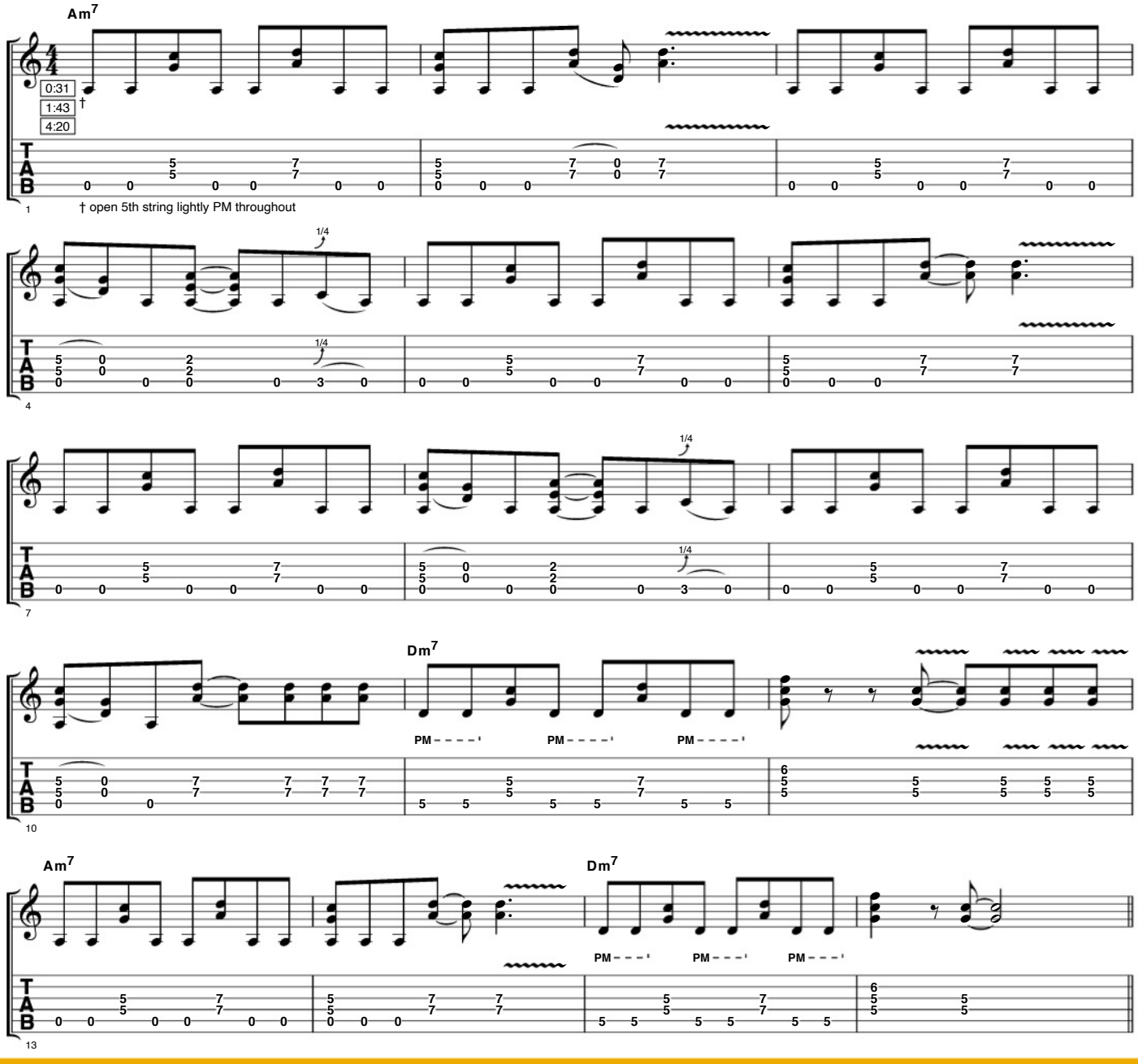
The verse is essentially the same as the intro but with several small variations (including a couple of changes from Am7 to Dm7), so the same playing instructions apply. The rest of the verses in the track are almost identical to this one, so we haven't transcribed them.

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Pre-chorus

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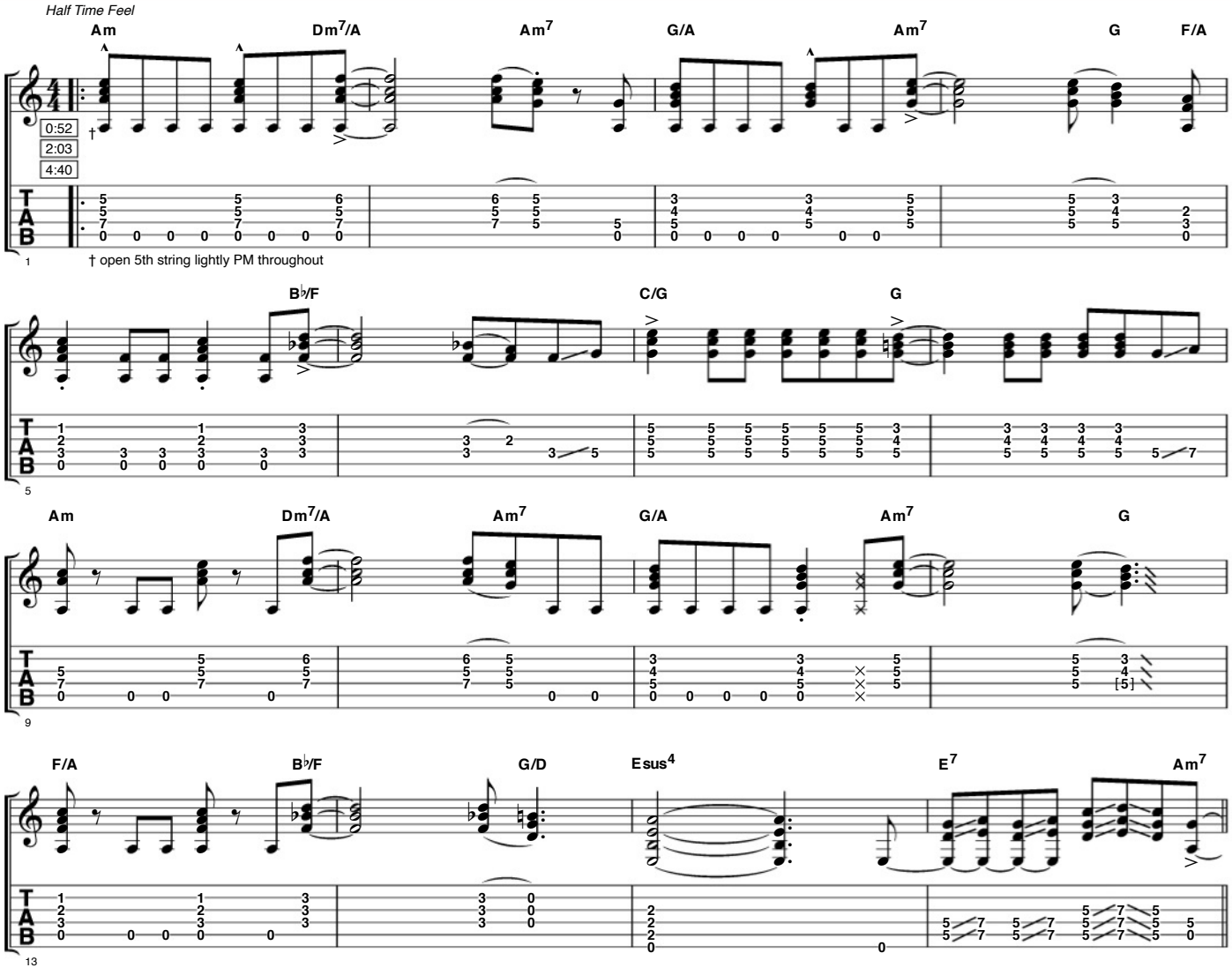
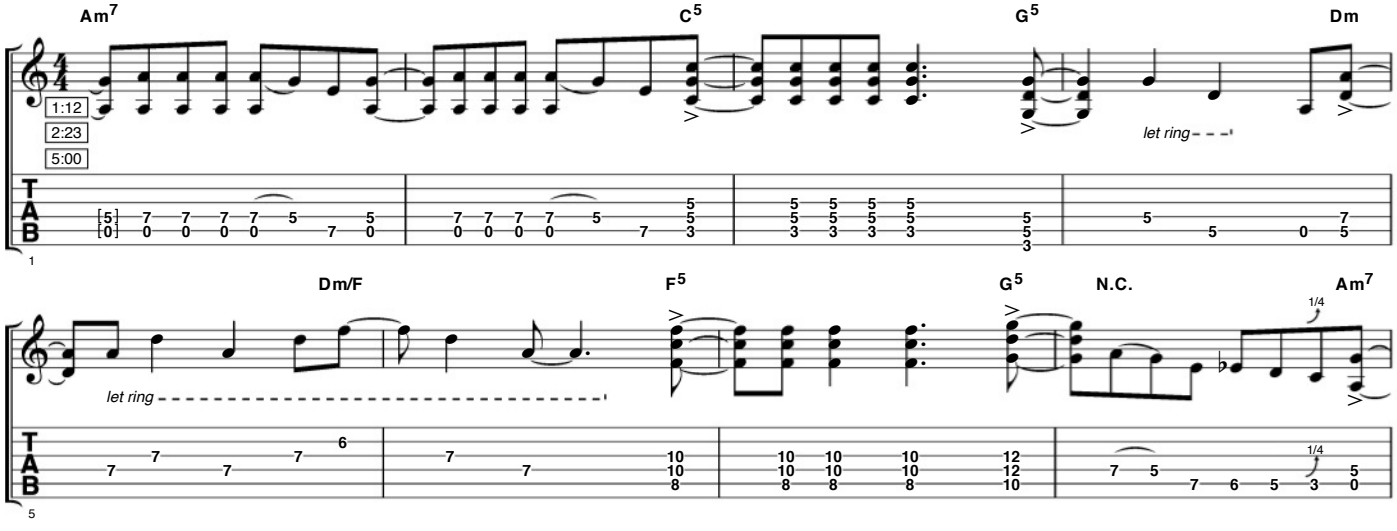
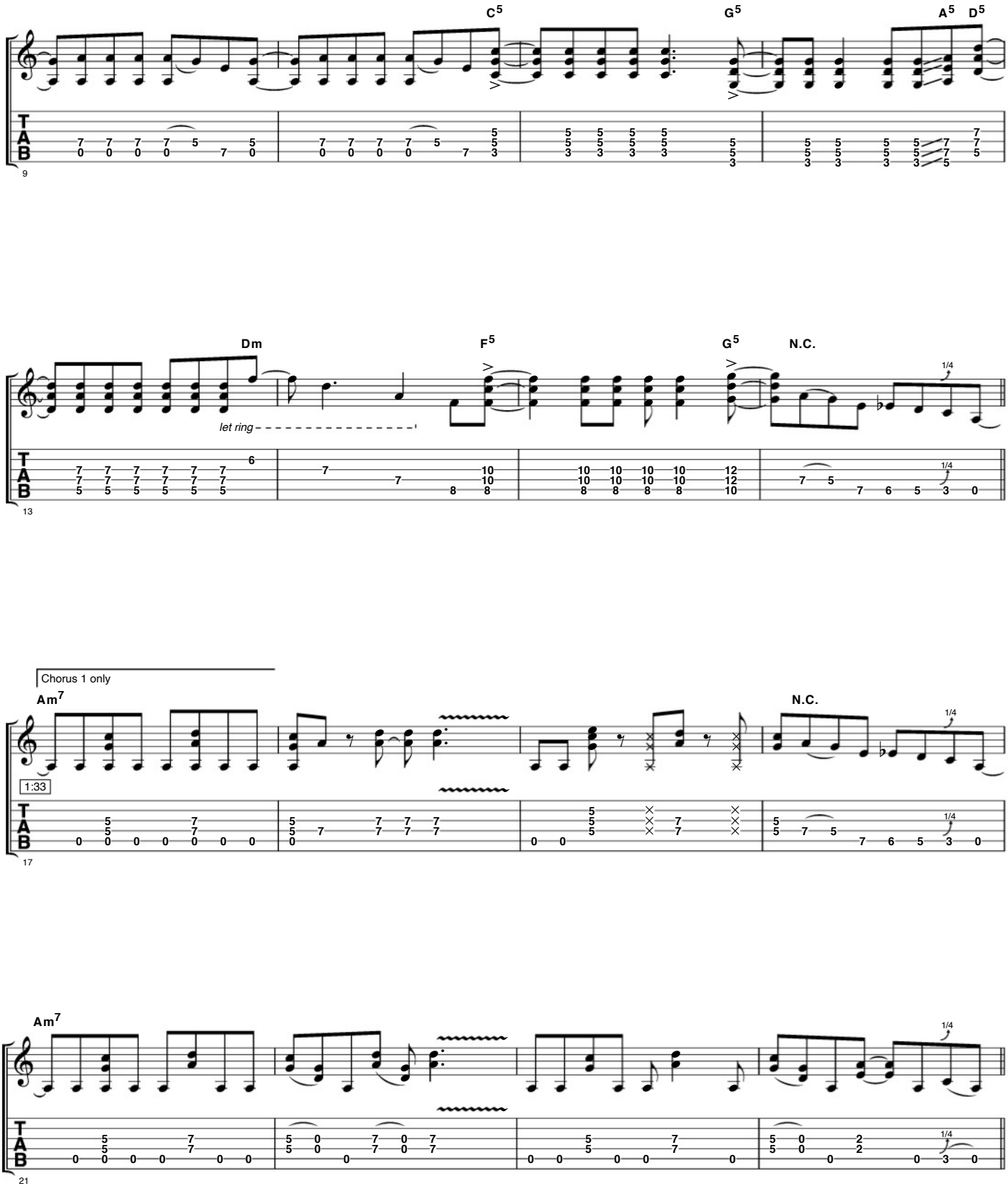
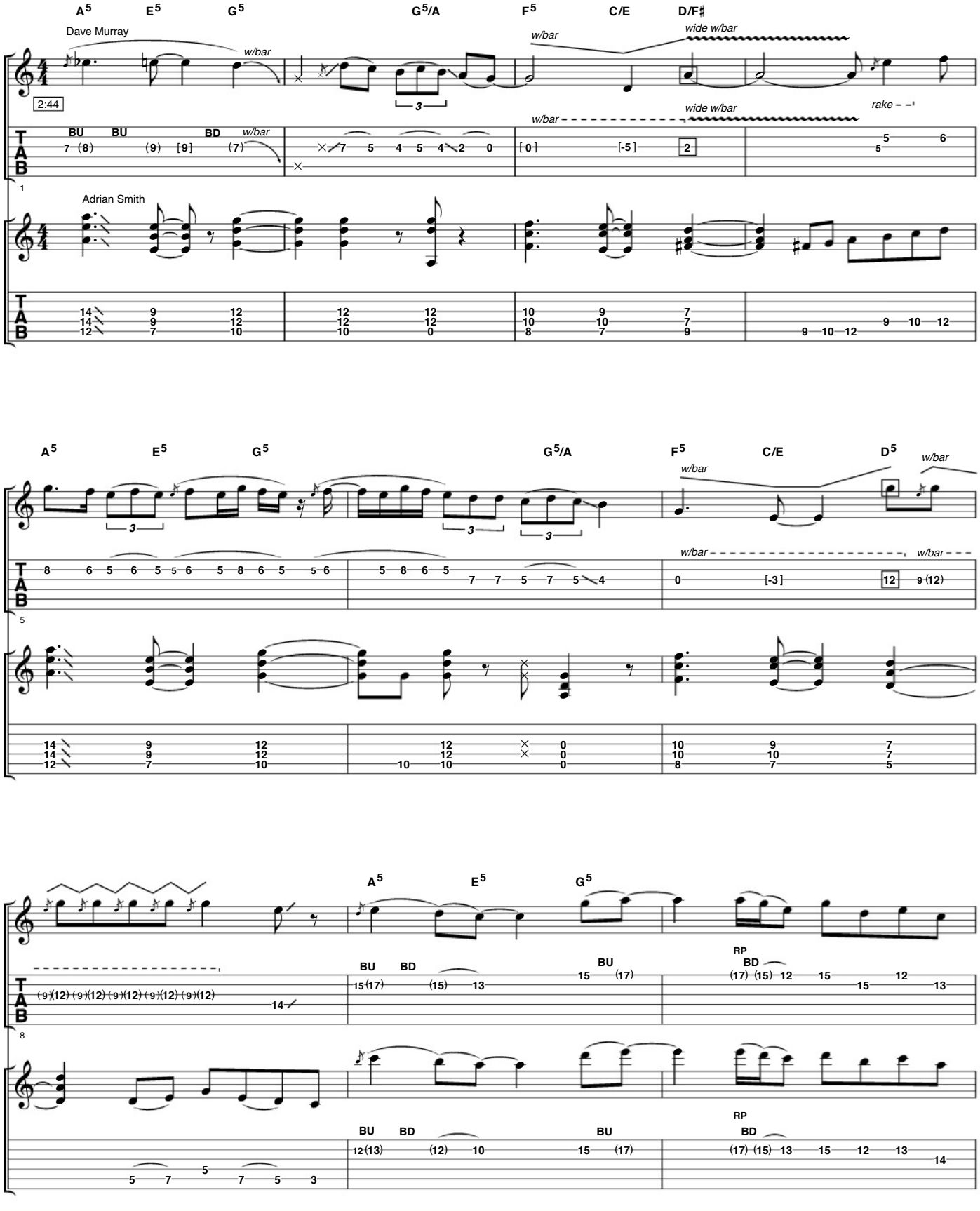
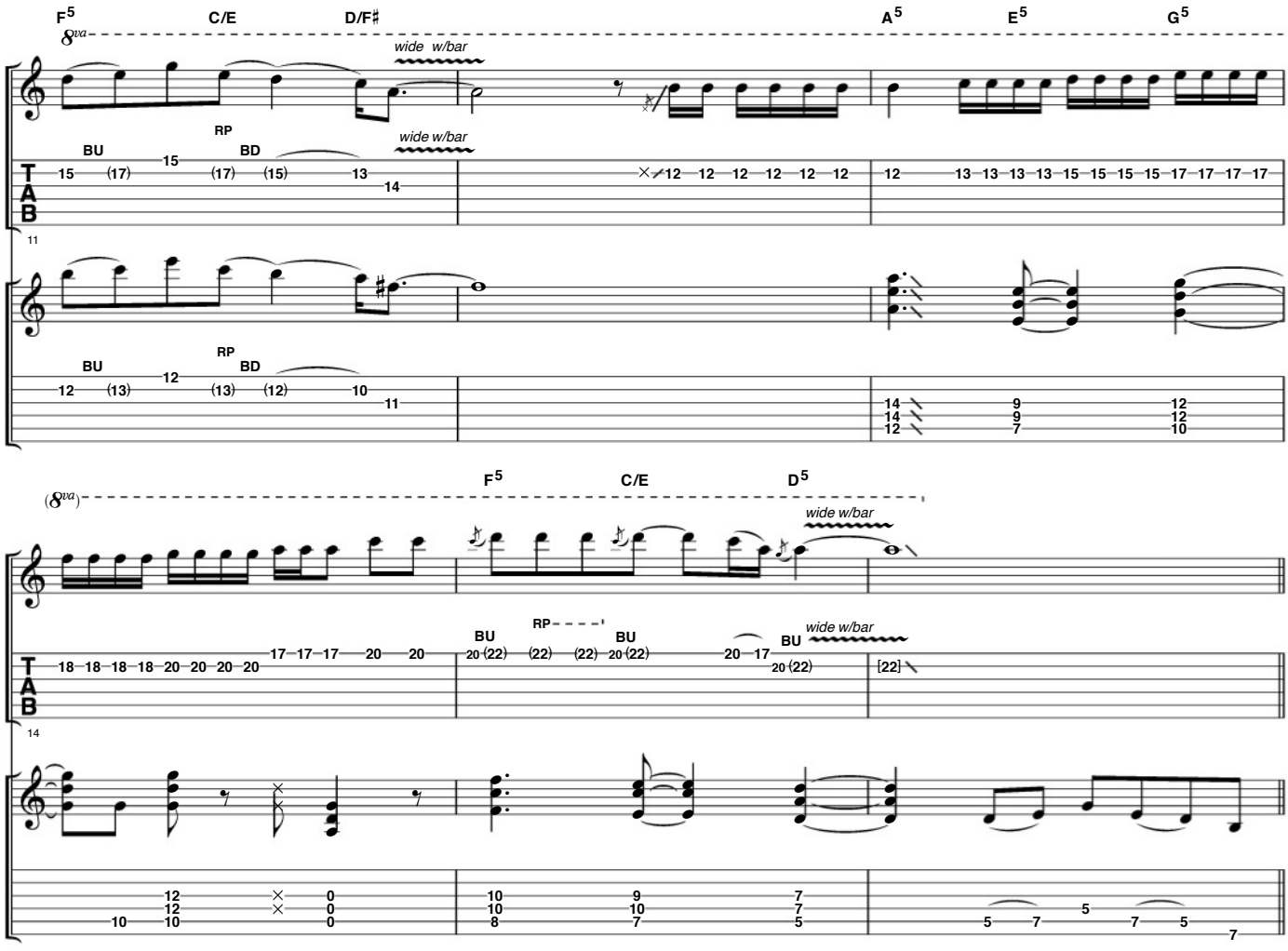

The drums drop to a 'half-time' feel here, but don't be fooled; the guitars continue at the same tempo as the verse. Make sure to emphasise the chord stabs in bars 1, 3 and 5; by contrast, the chords in bars 7 and 8 should be played fairly evenly. All three pre-choruses in the song are played in essentially the same way.

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Chorus

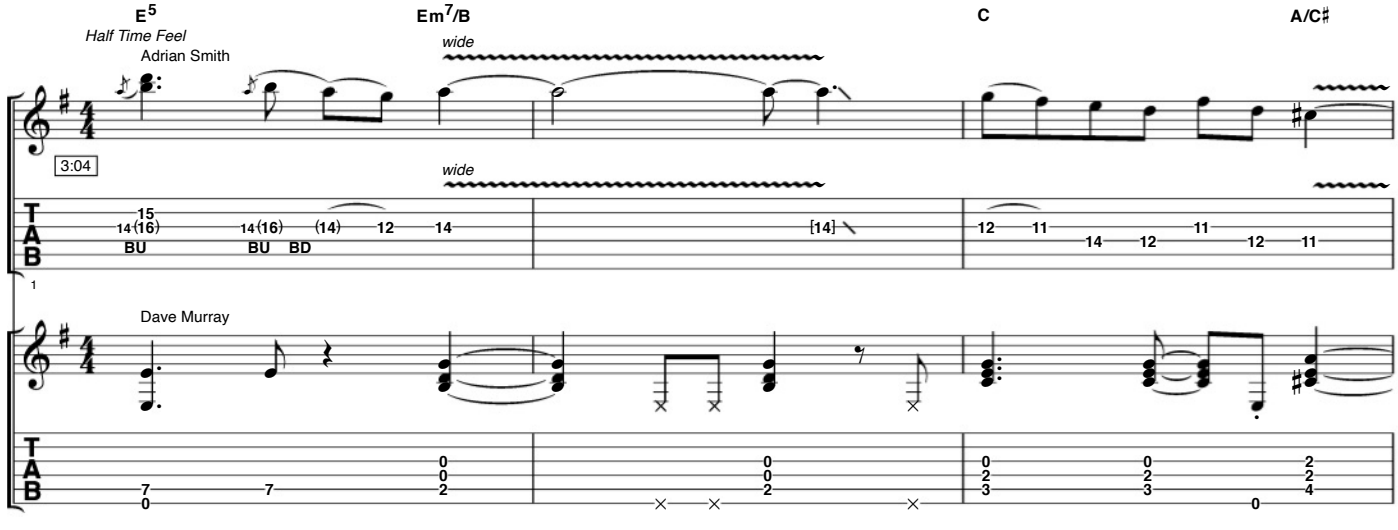
bit.ly/tg380audio

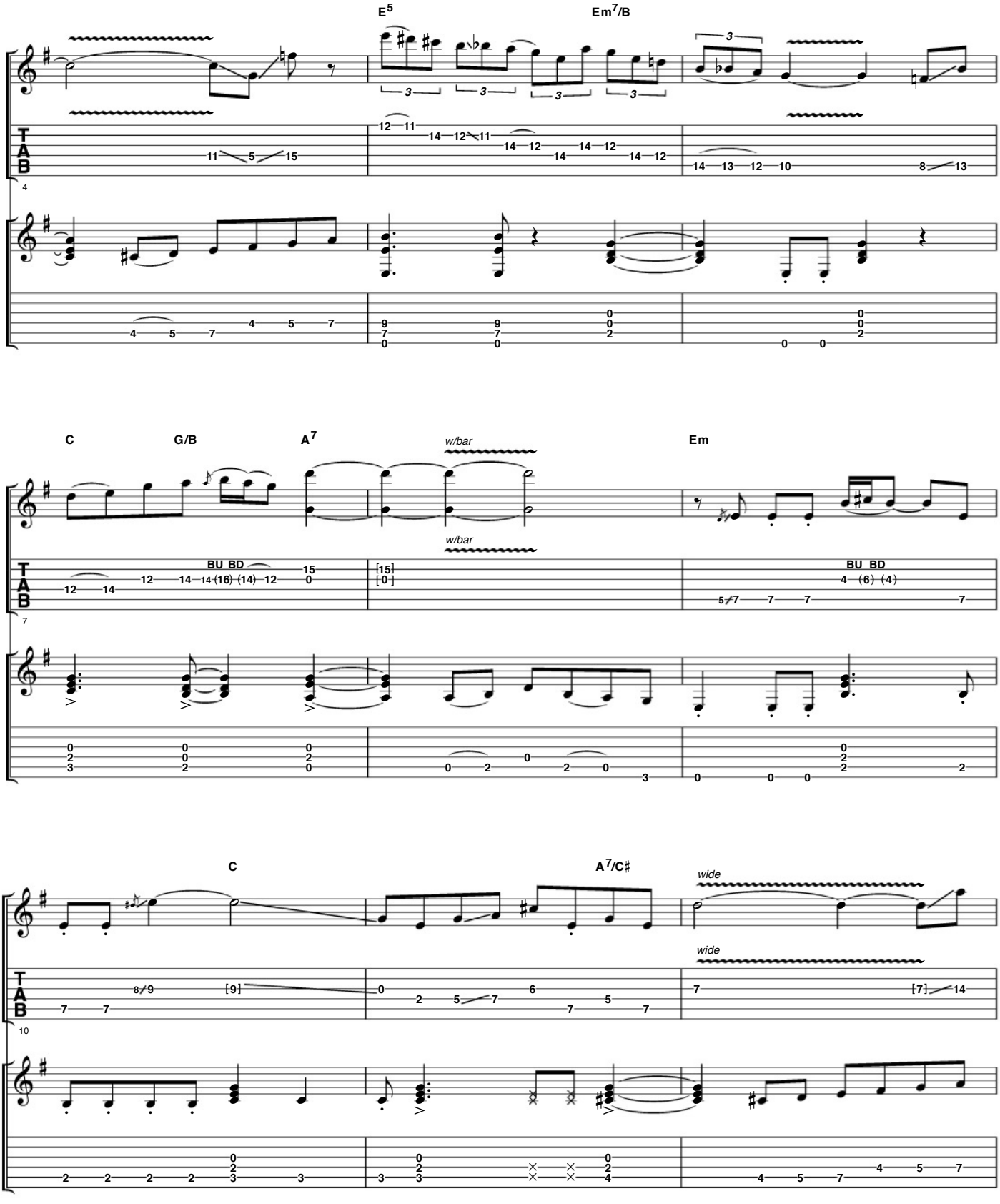


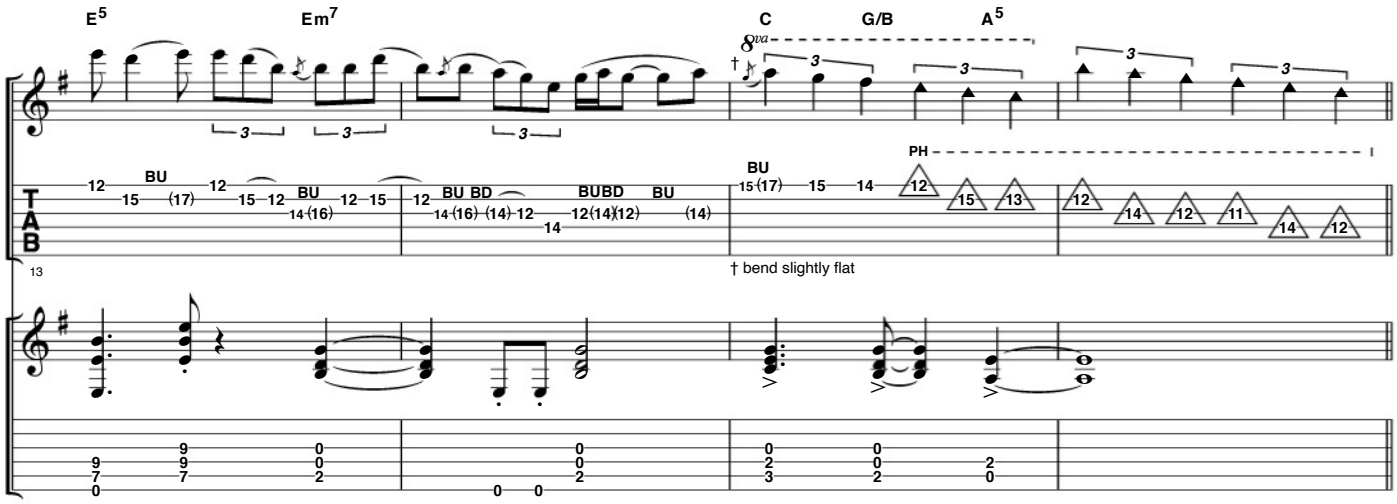
IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Chorus (cont'd) **bit.ly/tg380audio**

There's quite a lot going on here in the chorus. The main challenge is changing technique every couple of bars. The best way to approach this is to work on short one- to two-bar segments at a speed you can manage. Gradually piece the first eight bars together as each part begins to feel familiar.

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Solo 1 (Dave Murray) **bit.ly/tg380audio**

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Solo 1 (Dave Murray, cont'd) **bit.ly/tg380audio**

Murray's solo includes a mixture of rock techniques, such as whammy bar antics, fast legato passages and blistering alternate-picked runs. In our tab, Adrian Smith's rhythm part is shown under Murray's solo lines. Notice that in bars 9, 10 and 11 the two guitars play synced together in harmony.

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Solo 2 (Adrian Smith) **bit.ly/tg380audio**

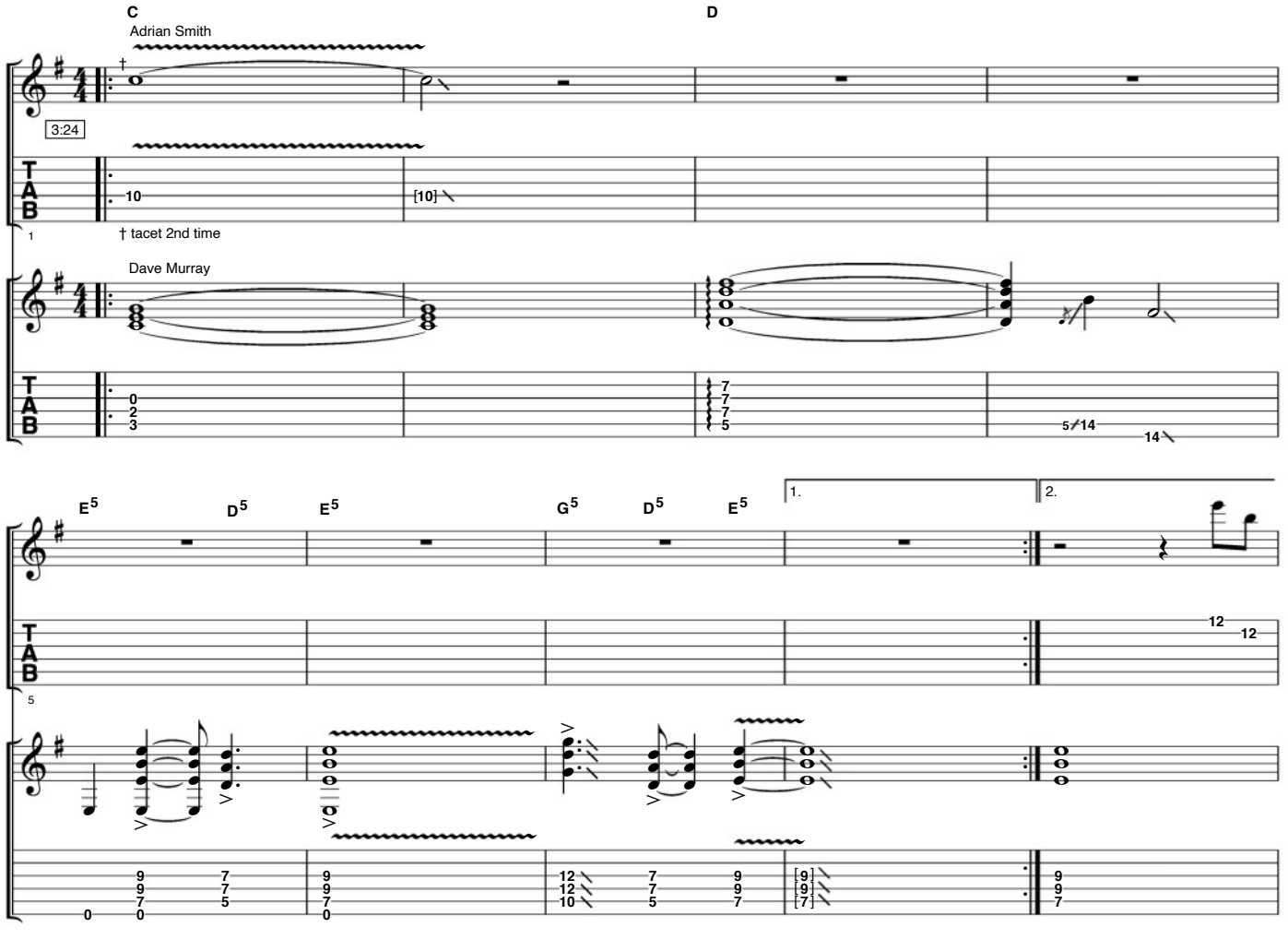


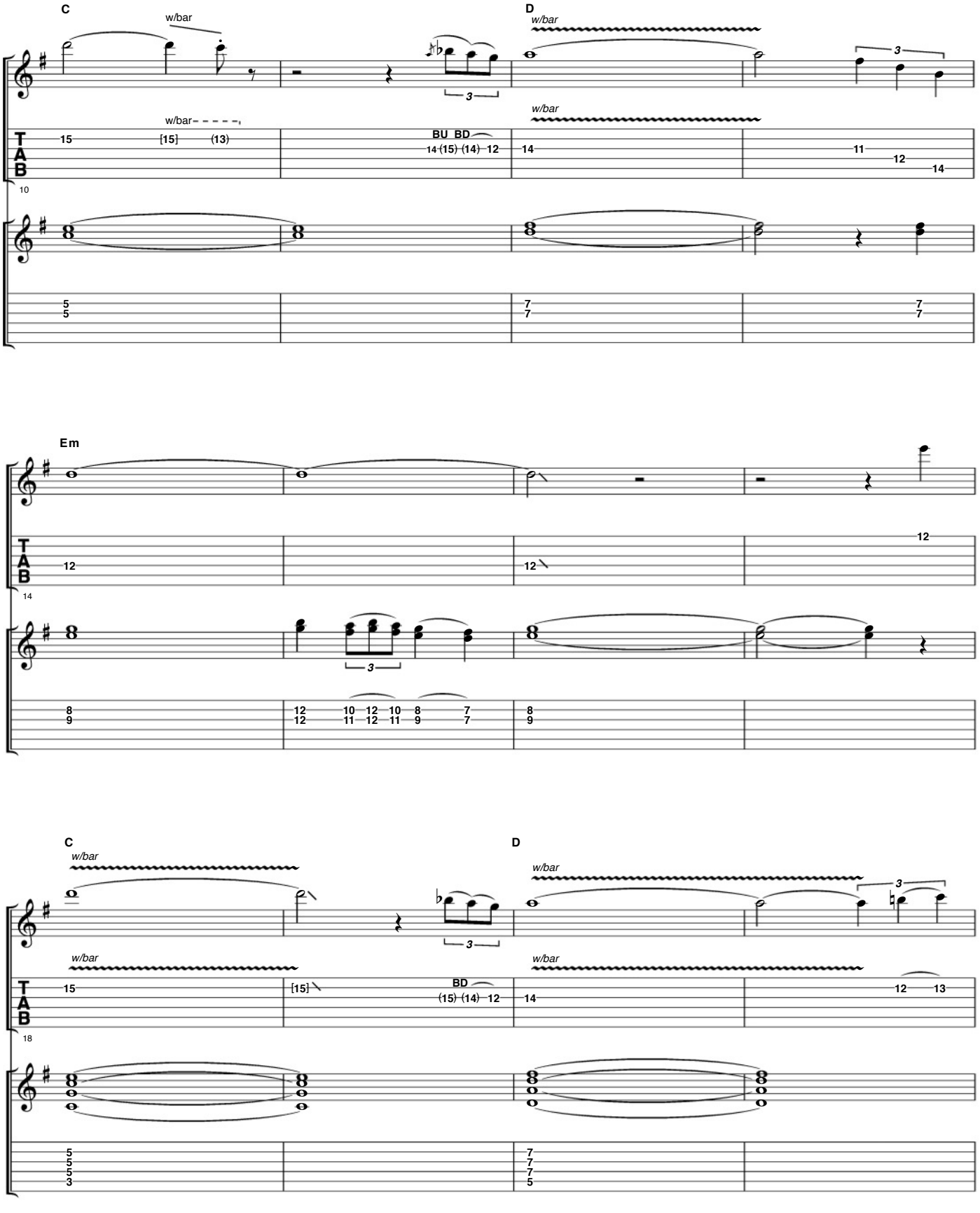
IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Solo 2 (Adrian Smith, cont'd) **bit.ly/tg380audio**

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Solo 2 (Adrian Smith, cont'd) **bit.ly/tg380audio**

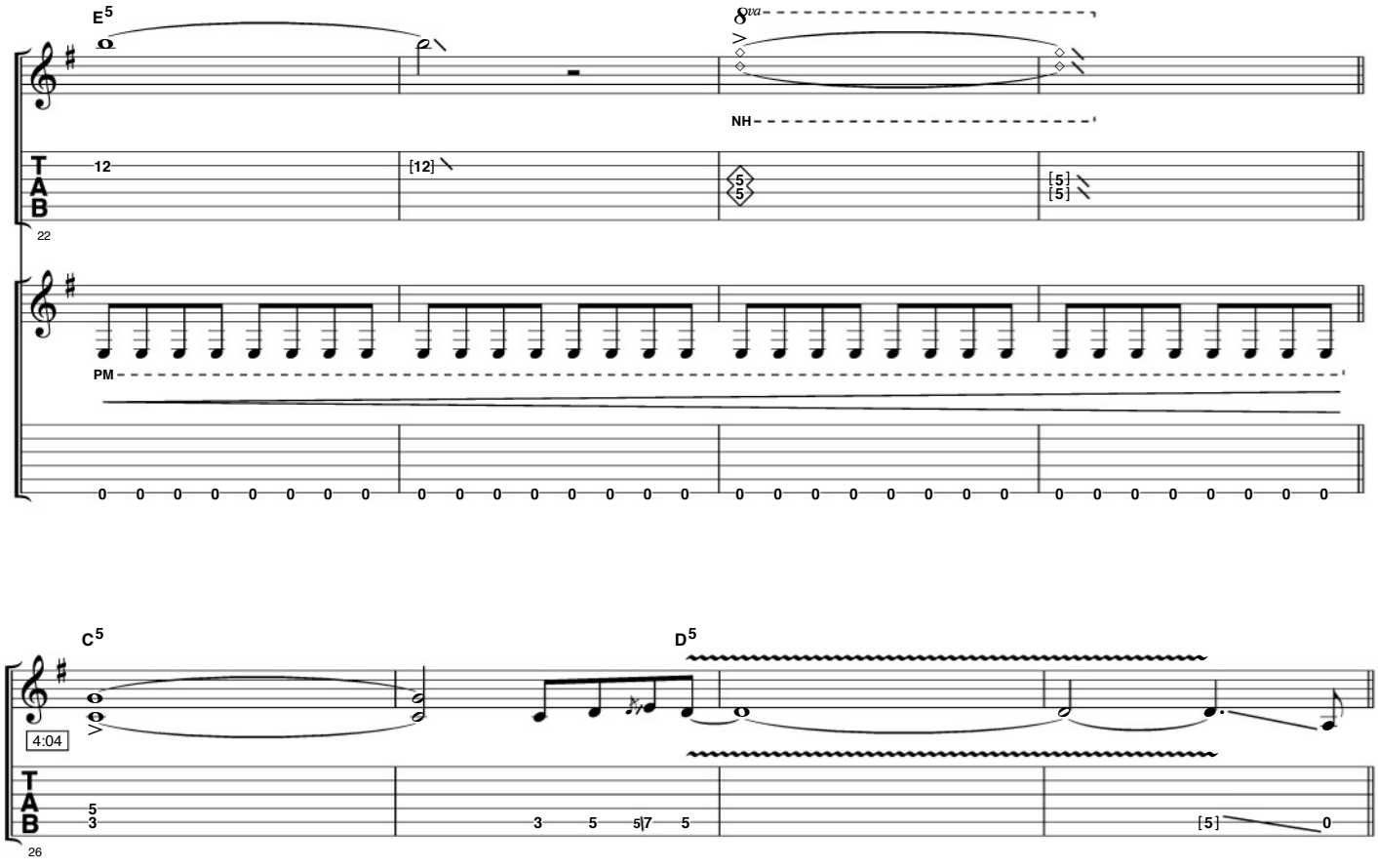


Once again, the tab is laid out so you can see the two guitar parts together. This time, Adrian Smith takes the lead. Practise the lick in bar 5 slowly; these are triplets, which means you'll be playing three notes per beat, which can feel unusual at first. The occasional slide and pull-off makes the line easier than an all-picked approach.

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Middle 8 **bit.ly/tg380audio**

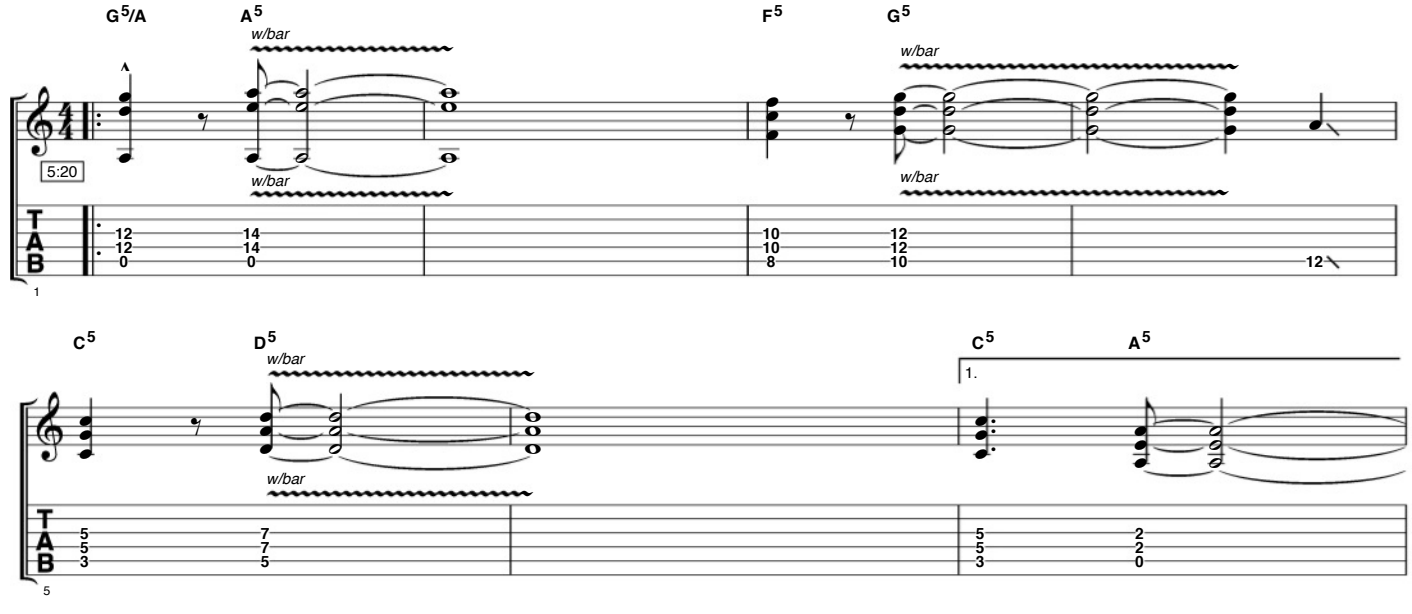


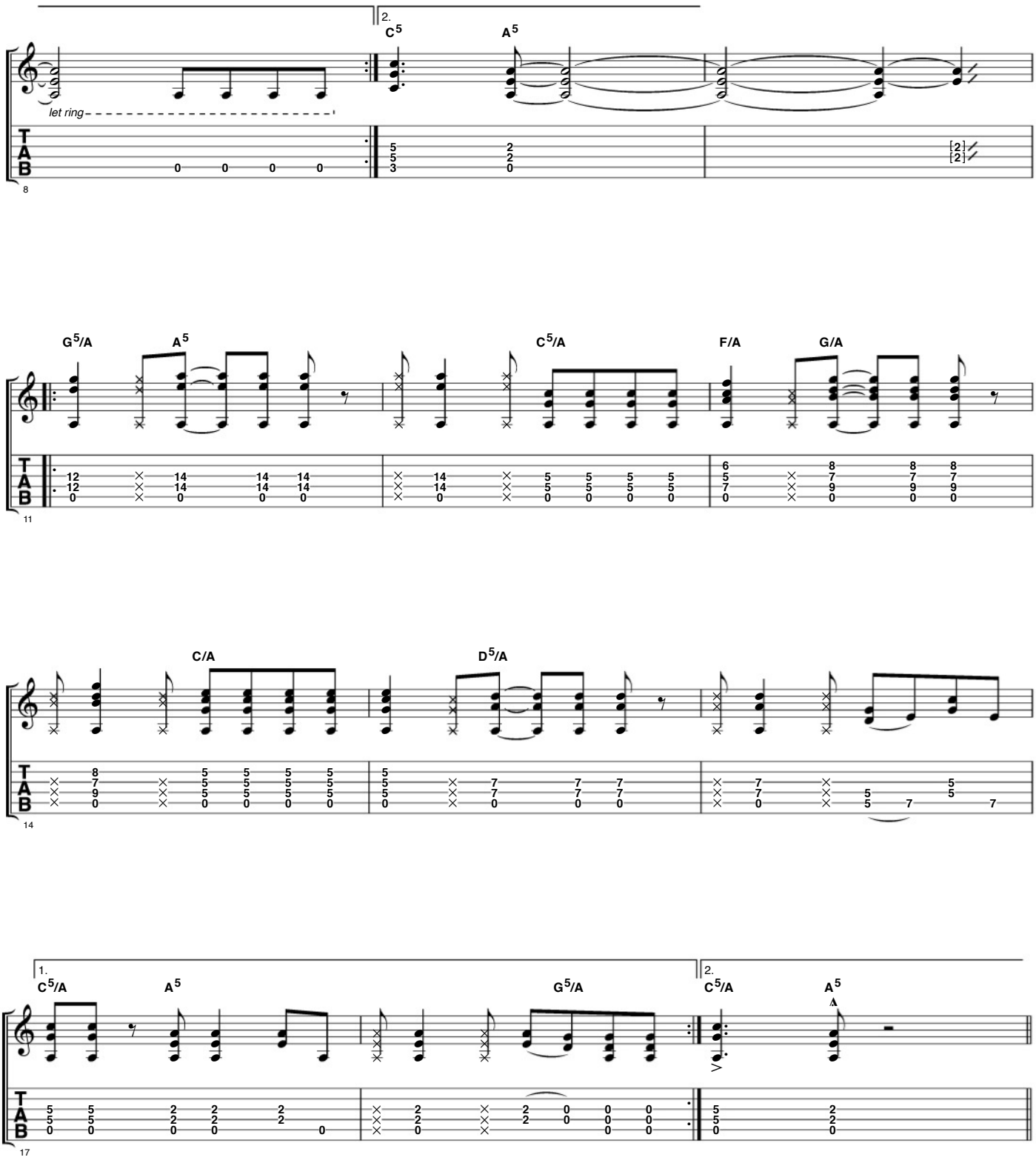
IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Middle 8 (cont'd) **bit.ly/tg380audio**

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Middle 8 (cont'd) **bit.ly/tg380audio**



There are at least four layers of guitars in the studio version of the song, but we've tabbed only the most important parts. In bars 10 to 17, the second line of tab is a representation of two separate guitar parts playing in harmony. It's easy to play on one guitar, though.

IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Outro **bit.ly/tg380audio**



IRON MAIDEN 2 MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT Outro (cont'd) **bit.ly/tg380audio**

After a final verse, pre-chorus and chorus you'll end up here in the outro. The chords in bars 1 to 7 are in time with singer Bruce Dickinson's cries of "midnight". Bar 11 to the end is played over a repeat of the intro/verse riff, so if you are playing with another guitarist, they should play that part.

THE FUTURE OF GUITAR FLATS

FLAT FEEL

ROUND SOUND

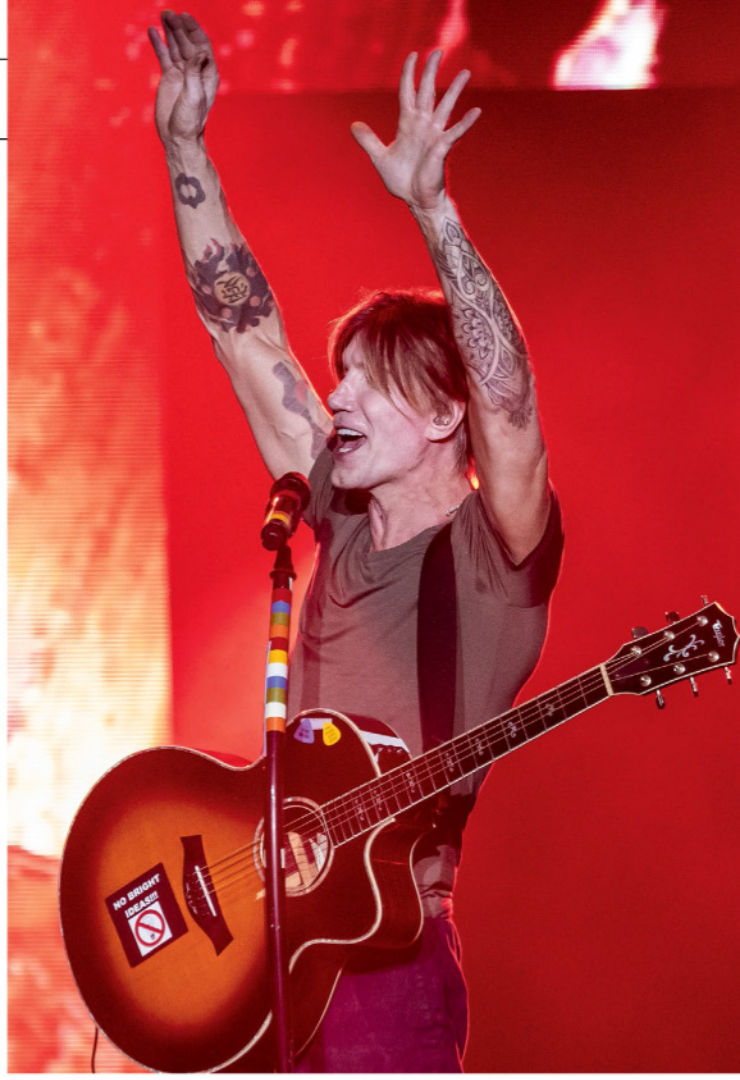
THAT SLINKY SOUND IN AN
ALL-NEW COBALT FLATWOUND

ERNIE BALL

OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

GOO GOO DOLLS

IRIS



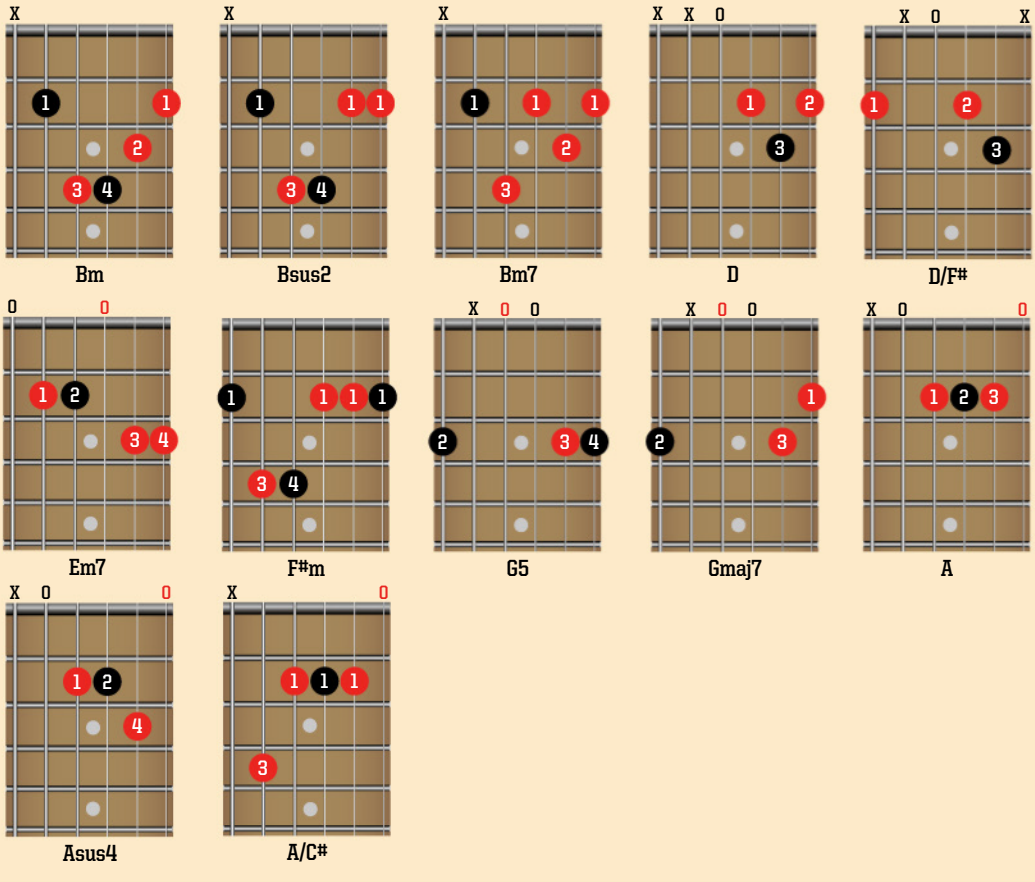
Try out John Rzeznik's unusual tuning, or jam along in standard in this much-loved power ballad from the '90s

Despite enduring a lengthy bout of writer's block, it didn't take frontman John Rzeznik long to write the Goo Goo Dolls' career-defining hit single, *Iris*. "It probably took me an hour or two," he revealed to ultimateguitar.com. Not bad for a song that would go on to top charts in several countries and still be getting airplay two decades on.

Guitarists might be surprised that the track came together with such an unusual altered tuning being used – namely BDDDDD. It was strange for a melodic rock band, but certainly not a first for Rzeznik, who had written GGD hits *Name* and *Black Balloon* in DAEAEE and D♭, A♭, D♭, A♭, D♭, D♭, respectively. Though the tuning is the most striking element, we recommend tackling *Iris* in standard. You'll have to make a few concessions on authenticity but you won't need to restring your guitar just for one song!

CHORDS

In Rzeznik's bizarre BDDDDD tuning, the sixth string is lowered by five semitones; the fifth string is tuned down seven semitones; the fourth string is standard; the third string is the same as the fourth; the second string is three semitones higher than standard; and the first string is the same as the second. This tuning isn't necessarily practical or advisable without a custom string gauge, so we've provided chord shapes in standard tuning here so you can easily strum along. However, we've tabbed the intro in Rzeznik's tuning for you to try out.



IRIS
From the Motion Picture *City Of Angels*
Words and Music by John Rzeznik
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Guitars and backing Simon Young. Photography Getty

SONG SHEET

Iris

Intro
Bm Bsus2 Bm G5 Gmaj7 G5 x2

Verse 1
D Em7 G5
And I'd give up forever to touch you
Bm7 Asus4 G5
'Cause I know that you feel me somehow
D Em7 G5
You're the closest to heaven that I'll ever be
Bm7 Asus4 G5
And I don't want to go home right now

Verse 2
D Em7 G5
And all I can taste is this moment
Bm7 Asus4 G5
And all I can breathe is your life
D Em7 G5
'Cause sooner or later it's over
Bm7 Asus4 G5
I just don't want to miss you tonight

Chorus
Bm7 Asus4 G5
And I don't want the world to see me
Bm7 Asus4 G5
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand
Bm7 Asus4 G5
When everything's made to be broken
Bm7 Asus4 G5
I just want you to know who I am

Repeat intro

Verse 3
D Em7 G5
And you can't fight the tears that 'ain't coming
Bm7 Asus4 G5
Or the moment of truth in your lies
D Em7 G5
When everything feels like the movies
Bm7 Asus4 G5
Yeah you bleed just to know you're alive

Repeat chorus

Middle
Bm7 A/C# D Bm7 A G5 x2
Bm7 Bsus2 Bm7 G5 x4

Solo
G5 F#m G5 Bm7
G5 F#m Bm7 /
G5 D/F# Bm7 /

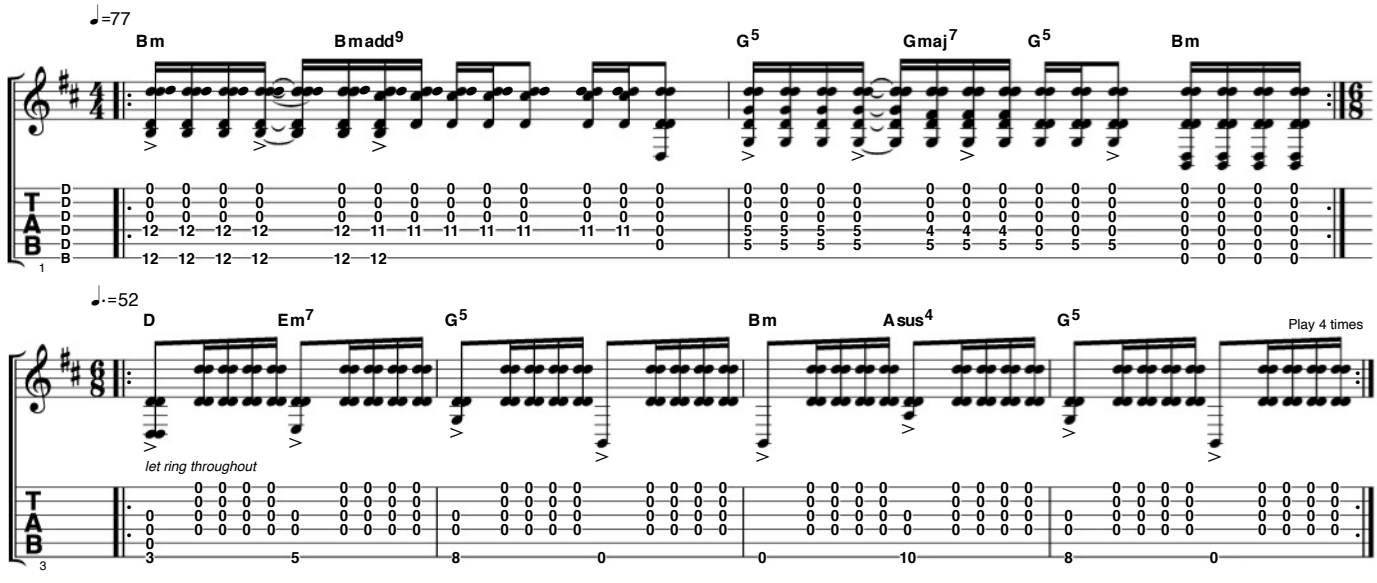
Breakdown
Bm7 A/C# D Bm7 A G5 x2

Repeat chorus x2

Last chorus end
Bm7 Asus4 G5
I just want you to know who I am
Bm7 Asus4 G5
I just want you to know who I am
Bm7 Asus4 Bm7
I just want you to know who I am

Outro
Bm7 A/C# D Bm7 A G5

GOO GOO DOLLS IRIS **Intro** bit.ly/tg380audio

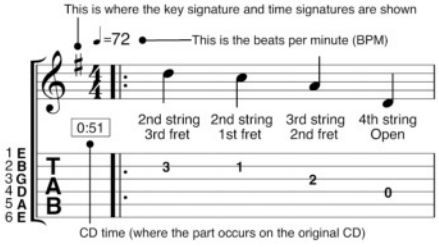


The opening two bars are in 4/4 time, so try to pick up on the eighth-note pulse – count '1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &' to keep time and emphasise your pick strokes on the first, fourth and seventh pulses. The rest of the song is in 6/8 time, so count '1 & a 2 & a' and emphasis the '1' and the '2' to get the right feel.

TAB GUIDE

Get more from TG by understanding our easy-to-follow musical terms and signs

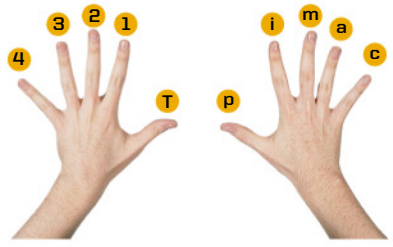
What is tab?



Tab is short for tablature, a notational system used to give detailed information as to where notes should be played on the fretboard. Tab appears underneath conventional music notation as six horizontal lines that represent the strings of the guitar, from the sixth (thick) string at the bottom to the first (thin) string at the top. On these lines, numbers represent which frets you place your fingers. For example, an A note on the 2nd fret, third string, will be shown as a number '2' on the third line down on the tab. Unfretted strings are shown with a '0'. The key and time signatures are shown in the notation. TG also includes a timestamp to tell you where in the original track you'll find each example and tempo expressed in beats per minute.

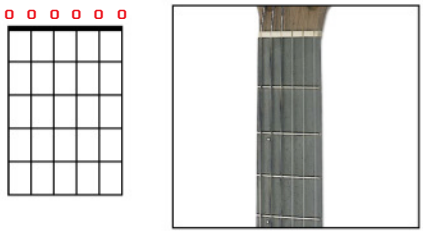
FRET BOXES: CHORDS, SCALES AND CAPO NOTATION

HAND LABELLING



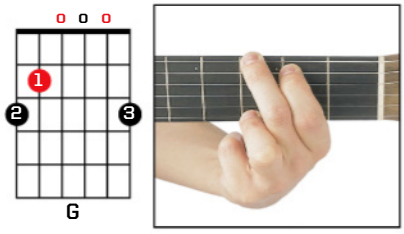
Here are the abbreviations used for each finger. Fretting hand: **1, 2, 3, 4, (T)** Picking hand: **p (thumb), i (index), m (middle), a (annular), c (little finger)**

NUT AND FRETBOARD



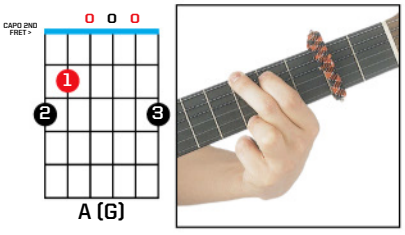
This fretbox diagram represents the guitar's fretboard exactly, as seen in the photo. This design is used for ease of visualising a fretboard scale or chord quickly.

CHORD EXAMPLE



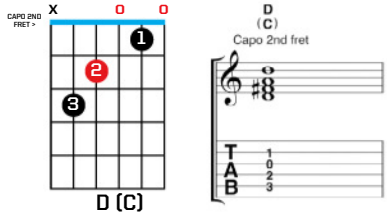
This diagram represents a G chord. The 'o's are open strings, and a circled number is a fretting hand finger. A black 'o' or circled number is the root note (here, G).

CAPO EXAMPLE



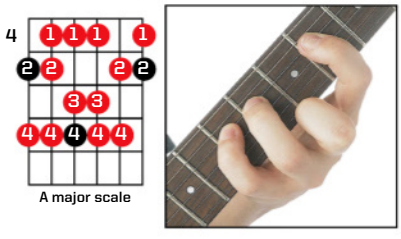
The blue line in the diagram represents a capo – for this A chord, place it at the 2nd fret. Capos change the fret number ordering. Here, the original 5th fret now becomes the 3rd fret, 7th fret now 5th fret, etc.

CAPO NOTATION



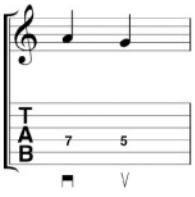
Here the chord looks like a C in the tab, but the capo on the 2nd fret raises the pitch to make it a D. The 2nd fret capo'd notes are shown with a '0' in the tab as if they were open strings.

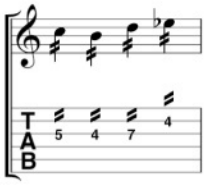
SCALE EXAMPLE



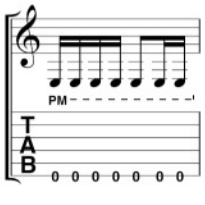
The fret box diagram illustrates the fret hand fingering for the A major scale using black dots for root notes and red dots for other scale tones. The photo shows part of the scale being played on the fourth string with the first, third and fourth fingers.

GUITAR TECHNIQUES: PICKING

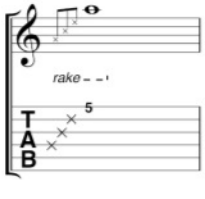
DOWN AND UP-PICKING

The symbols under the tab tell you the first note is to be down-picked and the second note is to be up-picked.

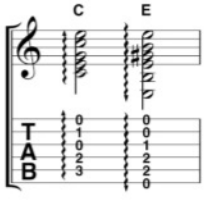
TREMOLO PICKING

Each of the four notes are to be alternate-picked (down and up-picked) very rapidly and continuously.

PALM MUTING

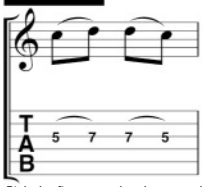


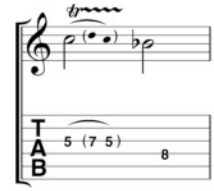
Palm-mute by resting the edge of your picking hand palm on the strings near the bridge saddles.

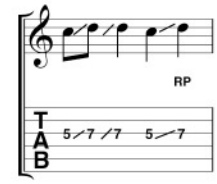
PICK RAKE

Drag the pick across the strings shown with a single sweep. This is often used to augment a rake's last note.

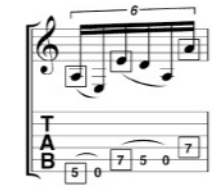
APPREGGIATED CHORD

Play the notes of the chord by strumming across the relevant strings in the direction of the arrow head.

FRETTING HAND

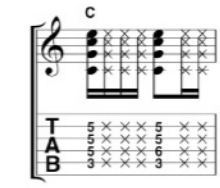
HAMMER-ON & PULL-OFF

Pick the first note then hammer down on the string for the second note. Pick the third note and pull-off for the fourth note.

NOTE TRILLS

After picking the first note, rapidly alternate between the two notes shown in brackets using hammer-ons and pull-offs.

SLIDES (GLISSANDO)

Pick the first note and then slide to the next. For the last two notes pick the first, slide to the next and then re-pick it (RP).

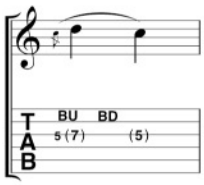
FRET-HAND TAPPING

Sound the notes marked with a square by hammering-on/tapping with your fret hand fingers, instead of picking.

FRET-HAND MUTING

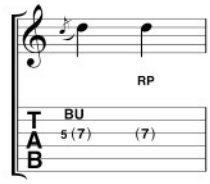


X markings represent notes and strings that are muted by your fret hand when struck by your picking hand.

BENDING AND VIBRATO

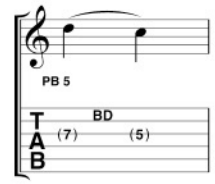
BEND AND RELEASE

Fret the first note (here, the 5th fret) and bend up to the pitch of the bracketed note, before releasing again.

RE-PICKED BEND

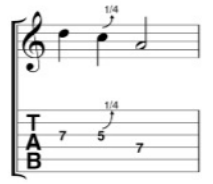


Bend up to the pitch shown in the brackets, then re-pick the note while holding the bent note at the pitch shown.

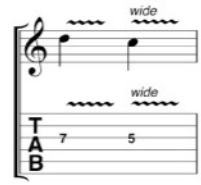
PRE-BEND



Silently bend the string up from the 5th fret (PB5) to the pitch of the 7th fret note, pick it and release to the 5th fret note.

QUARTER-TONE BEND

Pick the note then bend up a quarter-tone (a very small amount). This is sometimes referred to as a 'blues curl'.

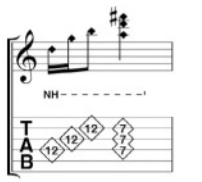
VIBRATO



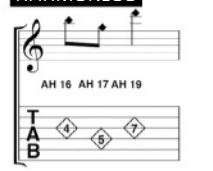
Your fretting hand vibrates the string by small bend-ups and releases. Exaggerate this effect to create a 'wide' vibrato.

HARMONICS

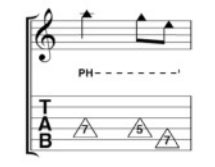
NATURAL HARMONICS



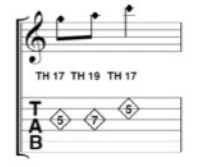
Pick the note while lightly touching the string directly over the fret indicated. A chiming harmonic results.

ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

Fret the note as shown, then lightly place your index finger directly over 'x' fret (AH'x') and pick (with a pick, p or a).

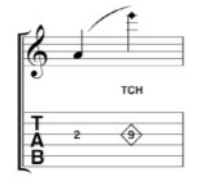
PINCHED HARMONICS



After fretting the note in the triangle, dig into the string with the side of your thumb as you sound it with the pick.

TAPPED HARMONICS

Place your finger on the note as shown, but sound it with a quick pick hand tap at the fret shown (TH17) for a harmonic.

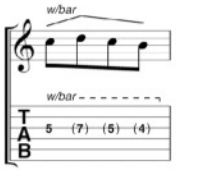
TOUCHED HARMONICS



A previously sounded note is touched above the fret marked TCH (eg, TCH 9) for it to sound a harmonic.

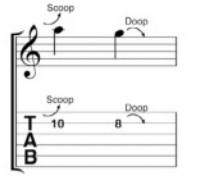
VIBRATO BAR / WHAMMY BAR

WHAMMY BAR BENDS



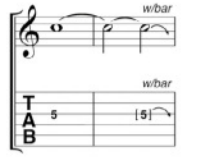
The note is picked as shown, then the vibrato bar is raised and lowered to the pitches shown in brackets.

SCOOP AND DOOP



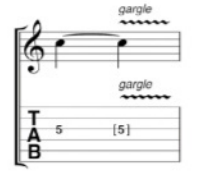
Scoop: depress the bar just before striking the note and release. Doop: lower the bar slightly after picking note.

SUSTAINED NOTE AND DIVEBOMB

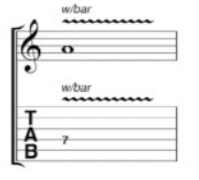


A Note is sustained then the vibrato bar is depressed to slack. The square bracket indicates a further articulation.

GARGLE

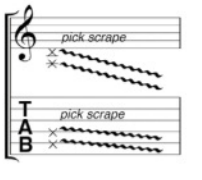


Sound the note and 'flick' the vibrato bar with your picking hand so it 'quivers'. This results in a 'gargling' sound!

WHAMMY BAR VIBRATO

Gently rock the whammy bar to repeatedly bend the pitch up and down. This sounds similar to fret hand vibrato.

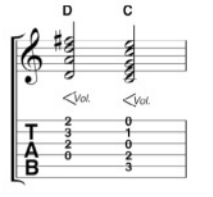
OTHERS

PICK SCRAPE

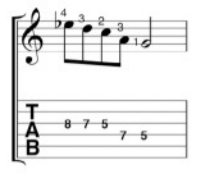


The edge of the pick is dragged either down or up along the lower strings to produce a scraped sound.

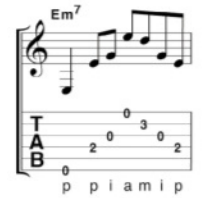
VIOLINING



Turn the volume control down, sound the note(s) and then turn the volume up for a smooth fade in.

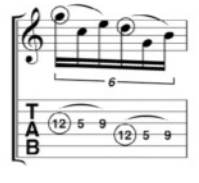
FINGER NUMBERING

The numbers in the traditional notation refer to the fingers required to play each note.

PIMA DIRECTIONS



Any kind of fingerpicking requirements are shown at the bottom of the tab notation.

PICK HAND TAPPING



Tap (hammer-on) with a finger of your picking hand onto the fret marked with a circle. Usually with 'i' or 'm'.

THE GAS STATION

REAL WORLD REVIEWS OF THE BEST NEW GEAR

Welcome to the GAS (Gear Acquisition Syndrome*) Station! Every issue, TG scours the market for the hottest new gear and brings you transparent reviews that you can trust. From the smallest of accessories that make your life easier, to big investments, such as brand new guitars, amps and effects pedals – if it's worth your attention, you'll find it here!

HOW WE TEST

CURATION
Our product selection is driven by our love of gear. We select the most exciting products on the market every month to bring you opinions you can trust.

FACE-VALUE REVIEWS
We're not gear snobs here at *Total Guitar*. We judge it on whether it looks good, sounds good and plays well – not by the name on the headstock.

***WHAT IS GAS?**
Gear Acquisition Syndrome is the guitar-player's never-ending urge to acquire new gear, irrespective of whether they actually need it. Don't pretend you don't have it – we all do!

NO SNAKE OIL
You won't find us getting hung up on hokey mythology or nonsense marketing speak: we aim to bring you bullsh*t-free opinions on the gear you're interested in.

WE CAN'T BE BOUGHT
TG review scores are a true reflection of our experts' opinion on the product they've been testing. You'll never find a rating in our mag that has been bought and paid for.

REAL WORLD REVIEWS
We test every product under the conditions that they were designed for. For example, if an amp is designed to be played loud, rest assured that we'll have tested it at rehearsal/gig volumes!

BEST BUY AWARD
TG Best Buy Awards are reserved for stand-out products that earn a 4.5 star overall rating. This is the most exciting new gear that you *need* to check out

PLATINUM AWARD
Reserved for the very best of the best, TG's Platinum Awards are given to class-leading, gamechanging products that score a maximum 5 stars in every category.

SUPERB, A BEST BUY	EXCELLENT	ABOVE AVERAGE KIT	SOME ISSUES	POOR
★★★★★	★★★★½	★★★½	★★½	★½

81 START ME UP
Five new products you need to check out

82 FENDER MIKE MCCREADY STRATOCASTER
A vintage-inspired signature Strat with effortless playability

86 GUILD S-100 POLARA KIM THAYIL
It took three decades, but the wait is finally over

88 FGN BOUNDARY ILIAD BIL2MHS
With Japanese quality and top tones, could this be your next T-style?

90 EPIPHONE JOE BONAMASSA 1963 SG CUSTOM
A tasty take on one of JoBo's own favourite axes

92 BOSS KATANA AIR EX
More Air, vicar? Boss pump up their popular wireless desktop amp

94 ELECTRO-HARMONIX PICO POG
Pico Blinder

01

05

03

02

04

START ME UP!

Five awesome new products to get your gear engine revving this month...

GRAPH TECH UN-LOCK NUT

1 Anyone whose guitar is equipped with a Floyd Rose will understand the problem of having to clamp/un-clamp their strings using an allen key. Well now, string replacement and maintenance just got easier thanks to Graph Tech's Un-Lock Nut, which does away with the nut locks entirely. Designed to be paired with locking tuners, this TUSQ nut requires zero mods to your guitar (beyond changing and setting up the nut), while alleviating some of the tedium of changing strings.

$29.95
www.graphtech.com

ANALOG CASES XTS STANDS

2 If you frequently use an interface, pedals or modellers on your desktop, then you'll like the look of the XTS Stand. These extendable stands will hold your gear at an angle for easy operation, and can be adjusted to fit to the width of the unit. They come in two sizes, with a solid tray also available for the larger version if you want to use multiple smaller pedals.

$42
www.analogcases.com

KRAMER LZZY HALE VOYAGER

3 Freshly announced, but already winning our unofficial award for Most Spangly Guitar of the Decade is the Lzzy Hale Voyager from Kramer, in the striking Black Diamond Holographic Sparkle finish. Building on Lzzy's love for X-shaped guitars, it's got an alder body, three-piece maple neck, ebony fingerboard (with lightning bolt inlays) and a Floyd Rose 1000 vibrato. The single-humbucker is a Kramer 85-T, joined by a single volume control, and it comes in a hard case.

£1,499
www.kramerguitars.com

HEADRUSH FRFR MKII CABS

4 Headrush was early to the FRFR cab market, and now it's updated its portable powerhouses to MKII versions. They're available in 1x8" (108 MKII) and 1x12"-loaded (112 MKII) and both now boast 2,000 watts of peak power, plus Bluetooth. They weigh just 9.53/15.7 kg, respectively, making them the perfect companion for your modeller or pedalboard preamp.

From £289
www.headrushfx.com

HARLEY BENTON ST-JUNIOR HSS SBK

5 When Harley Benton says 'affordable', you know it means it. Its latest release is this stealthy-looking short-scale S-style guitar that comes in at well under £100. With a tiny 19.37" scale-length, poplar body, maple neck and HSS pickup configuration, Harley Benton is clearly aiming this at younger/smaller players, but also guitarists looking for an on-the-go travel option.

£85
www.harleybenton.com

TONE
TONE

FENDER MIKE MCCREADY STRATOCASTER £1,649

A vintage-inspired signature Strat with effortless playability

A shining beacon in a sea of riff-heavy, punk-inspired grunge guitarists, Mike McCready's impeccable blues feel, Hendrix-esque chord work and earworm hooks have helped Pearl Jam stay afloat for over three decades – all while most of their contemporaries have sunk without a trace. Inspired by the likes of Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eddie Van Halen and Ace Frehley, Mike's classic rock approach to guitar helped define the Seattle band's sound – a sound players have been chasing since the early '90s.

Now, if there's one guitar heavily associated with the grunge icon, it's his battle-worn Fender Stratocaster. A fresh-faced McCready purchased his beloved Strat immediately after the success of the band's monumental debut album and he's used it on every record and tour since. He originally bought the beat-up six-string, believing it to be a 1959 model – and he even got a '59 tattoo to commemorate his favourite guitar. We can only imagine his surprise when Fender's Custom Shop informed him it was actually made one year later, in 1960.

Having already celebrated the guitar with a limited Custom Shop run, Fender has shifted to making a more affordable option. Now, if there was one word to describe the new McCready and Fender collaboration, it's ambitious. Not only has Fender set out to make a wallet-friendly rendition of a Custom Shop smash hit, but they've also committed to imitating the wear and tear of the original guitar – no small feat, for sure.

Let's start by addressing the rather distressed and battered elephant in the room. At first glance, it really does look like an elderly guitar behind a counter in a small town, and from a distance, it appears unmistakably to be McCready's beloved Fender. All the large scratches, dings and scuffs are accounted for. However, once you remove the guitar from its appropriately retro case, you'll start to notice the slight limitations of the Mexican facility compared to the efforts of the Custom Shop.

The ageing is a courageous attempt and mostly on the money. However, we can't help but feel the relic'ing looks almost *too* precise in places. The scalpel-sharp lines and surgically removed sections of finish serve as reminders that you're playing an artificially aged instrument. If anything, the bare alder showing through the sparse sunburst patches is a little too clean. The guitar is missing the thousands of hours of sweat, blood and tears the

> "IT MIGHT BE THE BEST FENDER NECK WE'VE PLAYED IN YEARS"

1 HEADSTOCK
Yes, the headstock does include that sizable chip from a live mishap with a speaker cab while performing with Neil Young in the band's heyday...

2 TONE CONTROL
To mimic the natural yellowing of the original guitar's plastics, Fender has swapped the standard white middle control with an aged white version.

3 TREBLE BLEED CIRCUIT
One non-vintage spec is the inclusion of a treble bleed circuit. This helps the guitar retain its bright presence while you adjust the volume.

AT A GLANCE

BODY MATERIAL: Alder

BODY FINISH: Road Worn Nitrocellulose Lacquer

NECK SHAPE: Slim "C"

SCALE LENGTH: 25.5" (64.77 cm)

FINGERBOARD MATERIAL: Slab Rosewood

FINGERBOARD RADIUS: 9.5" (241 mm)

FRETS: 21 Jescar Medium Vintage

PICKUPS: Custom Mike McCready '60s Single-Coil

SPECIAL ELECTRONICS: Treble Bleed Circuit

BRIDGE: 6-Saddle Vintage-Style Synchronized Tremolo with Bent Steel Saddles

CASE: Deluxe Brown Hardshell

CONTACT: Fender, www.fender.com

Total Guitar BEST BUY AWARD

Photography Phil Barker

It's evolution!

McCready's glorified G transitions

In 2021, McCready joined a rather prestigious list of Strat players who have been honoured with Custom Shop creations. With Master Builder Vincent Van Trigt at the helm, Fender meticulously reproduced Mike's distressed Strat in excruciating detail. Every scratch, ding and blemish was noted and precise measurements of the neck and body were taken in an effort to make this CS version indistinguishable from the original. Featuring a two-piece select alder body, a flat-sawn flame maple neck with a '60s oval C profile, a flat-lam rosewood fingerboard with 21 vintage frets and Custom Josefina hand-wound pickups, this would be as close as you'd ever get to playing Mike's actual guitar. There was only one problem – the model was limited to just 60 pieces and had an eye-watering price tag of $15,000. So, when news of a Mexican-made variant was unveiled, the guitar-playing community was buzzing with excitement.

original wears with pride. Perhaps that's *your* job!

Playability is where this guitar shines. This Strat is a player. The neck here is very slim – slimmer than you'd expect – and remarkably easy to navigate. Couple the slight profile with the heavily relic'd nature of its finish and you get a lightning-fast guitar that is addictive to play. Throw in the perfectly aged dots and flawless fretwork, and it might be the best Fender neck we've played in years – thanks, Mike!

Being a grunge legend's signature axe, you may expect hotter pickups onboard. However, McCready is a vintage gear hound and a massive fan of his guitar's original pickups. That's why Fender developed a custom set of '60s single-coils specially designed to reproduce the tone of their golden-age instruments.

These pickups sound superb and very convincing – one strum and we were transported to the swinging '60s. The tone is bright and responsive, all without sounding spikey or thin. These pickups have a retro charm that will surely put a smile on any vintage guitar fan's face. That said, it's not only throwback jangle this guitar can do – it distorts beautifully, taking maxed-out fuzz and face-melting gain in its stride.

It's fair to say heavily relic'd guitars always start a debate among guitarists, but what's not up for discussion is how good this particular guitar plays and sounds. This is a serious guitar that not only delivers a full-bodied tone but also has a neck that makes short work of anything you throw at it. It's no wonder McCready has the confidence to play this guitar on stage night after night on tour – perhaps it's a state of love and trust.

Daryl Robertson

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★½
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
USABILITY	★★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

ALSO TRY...

SQUIER CLASSIC VIBE '60S STRATOCASTER — £375

This is the most affordable '60s Strat available right now, and frankly, you'll be hard-pushed to find better value for money elsewhere.

FENDER VINTERA II '60S STRATOCASTER — £1,049

Aged guitars not your bag? The Vintera II offers superb playability and the vintage-style '60s pickups will help you achieve the sound you're after.

FENDER 1960 STRATOCASTER TIME MACHINE HEAVY RELIC — £4,849

This Custom Shop Strat is as close as you'll get to McCready's original guitar without actually purchasing a vintage example from the '60s.

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GUILD POLARA KIM THAYIL

£859

It took three decades, but the wait is finally over

Kim Thayil is not just grunge royalty, he's one of the most influential guitarists of his generation. While Thayil may not be spoken about in the same breath as Eddie Van Halen or Jimmy Page, the Soundgarden great has had a huge effect on alternative rock. His masterfully crafted riffs and beautifully chaotic lead work would go on in part to define the Seattle sound and, in turn, inspire everyone from Alice In Chains to Nirvana, creating a sonic shockwave that is still felt to this day.

Grunge fans have been eagerly awaiting the release of a Kim Thayil signature since the Soundgarden axe-man helped breathe new life into this almost-forgotten model in the late '80s and early '90s. Now, while the project may have been plagued with bad luck over the last three decades, we are glad to see the partnership finally bear some fruit.

Inspired by Kim's prized '78 S-100, this guitar is simply stunning. Not only does this all-mahogany six-string wear its gilded gold hardware and jet-black getup well, but its attractive body style is as practical as it is handsome.

We found the Polara to be incredibly comfortable, and the build quality here is commendable. This guitar feels as solid as a rock and the chunky body means there's no neck dive for this double-cutaway. Speaking of the neck, Thayil has opted for a "vintage soft U" profile, which certainly has some girth to it. Okay, it's not as rounded as a vintage Les Paul, but it's substantial enough to satisfy fans of '70s guitars.

Importantly, the Polara feels just at home playing D-tuned sludgy riffs as it does wailing solos and everything in between. That's thanks in part to the unparalleled upper fret access. Just like a certain devil-horned Gibson, there's no note on this neck that isn't obtainable – this results in a truly inspiring guitar to play.

As you'd expect, this new guitar seeks to equip players with all the tones they require to nail Kim's signature sounds. The Alnico II loaded humbuckers are full, warm and pack plenty of punch – just the ticket for those aspiring to recreate the monstrous riffs from across Thayil's remarkable discography.

Turn down the gain and lighten your touch and this Guild will gift you shiny and sparkling cleans that are perfectly detailed and expressive. In the middle position, with the onboard phase switch engaged, the sound becomes noticeably thinner and more nasal – perfect if you want a lead line that cuts like a knife.

It's a given that this beautiful guitar can nail Kim's unmistakable tones, but the sheer versatility of the Polara should most definitely not be outshined by the name on the headstock.

Darryl Robertson

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★½
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★½
PLAYABILITY	★★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

1 DESIGN FEATURES
We love the subtle nods to Thayil's discography, from the *King Animal* truss rod cover and *Badmotorfinger* logo on the control cover.

2 HEADSTOCK
The oversized headstock takes pride of place at the top of the neck and oozes 1970s charm.

3 PICKUPS
Equipped with a set of HB-1 humbuckers and an easy-to-access phase switch, you'll be able to perfectly recreate any and all of Thayil's iconic riffs.

AT A GLANCE

BODY WOOD: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany
SCALE LENGTH: 24 3/4" (629mm)
NECK SHAPE: Vintage Soft "U"
NUT WIDTH: 1 11/16" (43mm)
FINGERBOARD MATERIAL: Indian Rosewood
FINGERBOARD RADIUS: 12.5" (320mm)
FINGERBOARD INLAYS: Blocks - Pearloid
FRETS: 22 Narrow Jumbo
BRIDGE: Tune-O-Matic w/ Guild Compensated Stopbar tailpiece
TUNING MACHINES: Grover Rotomatics
PICKUPS: 2 x Guild HB-1 Dual-Coil Bridge
CONTROLS: Neck Volume & Tone, Bridge Volume & Tone, 3-way Toggle Pickup Switch, and Phase Switch
FINISH: Black
CONTACT: Guild, guildguitars.com

Photography Phil Barker

FGN BOUNDARY ILIAD BIL2MHS

£549

With Japanese quality and top tones, could this be your next T-style?

Japan's FujiGen factory is well-known in the world of guitar manufacturing. Across its history, the company has built guitars for some of the most iconic brands, such as Fender, Ibanez and Yamaha, and has gained an eviable reputation for impressive quality. As well as lending its expertise to others, FujiGen is also the home of FGN – a line of classic-yet-contemporary guitars that promises to put Japanese build quality into a humble, affordable package, thanks to the absence of a "big name" on the headstock.

It is from this lineage that our Iliad heralds. Lifted from the FGN's ranks of Telecaster-inspired instruments, the Iliad is marketed as a modern twist on Fender's single-cut design, retaining much of the charm of the original template, and injecting it with some distinct FujiGen flair.

That is achieved by the basswood body and maple neck, which are paired with a 22-fret maple (or rosewood, depending on the finish) fingerboard. A classic combination found in affordable instruments, these specs are joined by proprietary pickups and a six-saddle FGN bridge, as well as Gotoh tuners and a neat elongated pickguard.

All of the above can be had for just £549, and with FGN in its corner, this model has the potential to be a contender for one of the best affordable electrics available right now. We've certainly found this guitar to be a serious, serious player.

The body is expertly finished and contoured, with a subtle yet effective sculpted neck joint for accessing the upper frets – access that is further facilitated by the slightly sharper cutaway. The neck, likewise, isn't a flimsy chunk of wood that gets lost in the hand, it's a substantial U-profile piece that works wonders in promoting smooth playing, especially when paired with the compound fingerboard.

The 10"-14" radius encourages effortless fretting. FGN's 'Circle Fretting System' (slightly circular frets, instead of dead straight) supposedly improves pitch and tone. The effects may or may not be negligible, but we'd argue that small details like this matter, and contribute to the high-quality feel when playing the Iliad.

As for tones, it's all too easy to be skeptical about proprietary pickups found on affordable guitars, but these are exceptional performers. The neck humbucker in particular is especially addictive, and is wired to a coil-split push/pull tone pot that channels authentic Tele twangs as well as beefy cleans. The bridge single-coil, while perhaps not as special, still wouldn't be out of place in a more expensive guitar.

The best praise that could be bestowed upon the Iliad is that it feels like it could warrant a higher price tag. If you're looking for a top-performing T-style, with street prices of around £500, the Iliad is a must-try.

Matt Owen

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★½
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★½
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★½
PLAYABILITY	★★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★½

1 NECK
The Iliad's U-shape hunk of maple is expertly sculpted, and makes for a potent playing tool when paired with the compound fretboard.

2 PICKUPS
It's easy to be sceptical about proprietary pickups on an affordable instrument, but these are hard to fault. The addictive neck pickup deserves a shoutout, as does that highly effective push-pull coil-split switch.

3 TUNERS
Not all guitars at this price come with premium tuners, and the Gotoh SD91s here are well regarded.

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Basswood
NECK: Maple, U-Shape, Bolt-on
FINGERBOARD: Maple, 10"-14" compound radius
FRETS: 22, Medium
PICKUPS: FGN BH-n, FGN BIL-b
CONTROLS: 3-way lever pickup-selector switch, 1 Master Volume, 1 Master Tone w/ Push-Pull Coil Split
HARDWARE: FGN FJIL-6SSTD bridge, Gotoh SD91-05M tuners
FINISH: Black
CONTACT: FGN fgnguitars.com

Photography Phil Barker

CUSTOM
RHYTHM
TREBLE
VOLUME
TONE
Epiphone

EPIPHONE JOE BONAMASSA 1963 SG CUSTOM

£1,499

A tasty take on one of JoBo's own favourite axes

The SG can feel like a strange beast if you're not used to the guitar's idiosyncrasies. If you play almost any other six-string it can seem alien. But whatever you think, this collab from Epiphone and bluesman Joe Bonamassa is an absolute stunner.

So what makes the SG design that different from the norm? Well, the neck joins the body at the 22nd fret so it sticks out further, putting the 12th fret out in clear air. SGs can also suffer headstock dive due to the long neck, so you've either got to keep pulling it back up or invest in a grippy strap. Some players don't like the three humbuckers or big trem of the Custom version, either, but enough of the negative stuff.

Our '63 Custom is a faithful recreation of Joe's own Gibson forbear, with its mahogany body's devil-like horns, slim-taper neck, and pearl-inlaid ebony fingerboard with matching headstock decoration. The Cherry finish is smooth and glossy, and the mahogany grain peeks through the wine red stain beautifully complementing the white plastic pickguard and matching 'Custom' plate, there to hide the neck join.

Powering the Custom are three Epiphone ProBucker pickups – a slightly hotter 3 at the bridge, and twin 2s at neck and middle position. Although Chinese-made, their spec is very close to that of Gibson's own pickups. A nylon-saddle ToneLock tune-o-matic bridge and Epiphone-engraved 'lyre' style Vibrola tailpiece complete the picture. Hardware is posh gold-plate, too. Of the switching options available on a three-humbucker guitar, Epiphone has opted for bridge, neck, and bridge/middle together in parallel, all selected from the three-way toggle.

Sound-wise, the body's relatively light mass and build give it a vibrancy that you don't get from a Les Paul. The bridge pickup is clear and strident, while the neck is either Les Paul lite or fat Strat, depending on how you view it. With the selector switch in the centre, the proximity of neck and bridge pickup to each other creates a 'vowelly' tone that's great for funky rhythm or picked arpeggios.

Whack up the wick and our 'both pickups on' sound is scooped-out and honky, while flipping to the bridge it's instant Angus Young. Go to the neck and try to resist the *Sunshine Of Your Love* riff – Clapton nicknamed his SG 'Sunny' after the song. And when you consider how much you can do with twin volume and tone controls, you'll see there's a ton of great sounds here.

To some, £1,499 may seem a lot for an Epiphone; certainly when you can find Gibson's own SG Standard for a similar price online, but there's no denying there is a helluva lot of guitar here.

Neville Marten

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
PLAYABILITY	★★★★½
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★

1 BODY
The SG's shape is unmistakable, with its body's pincer-like horns, chamfered edges that provide a sort of comfort contour, and a neck join that offers 100% access.

2 TWO-PICKUPS-ON SOUND
The SG Custom is unusual for having three humbuckers. In its centre position the toggle switch puts the bridge and middle pickups together, offering some cool vowel-like tones.

3 NECK
Joining the body at its very top fret, the SG shape provides total fretboard access. It takes a bit of getting used to, but if you're Angus Young, nothing else will do!

AT A GLANCE

BODY: Mahogany
NECK: Mahogany
NECK SHAPE: Slim Taper
SCALE LENGTH: 629mm (24.75")
FINGERBOARD: Ebony, 305 mm (12") radius
PICKUPS: Epiphone ProBuckers
CONTROLS: Two volume, two tone
SWITCHING: Three-way toggle
FINISH OPTIONS: Cherry
CONTACT: Epiphone, epiphone.com

Photography Olly Curtis

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VOLUME
BASS
MIDDLE
TREBLE
MASTER
GAIN
AMP TYPE
POWER
INPUT

1 GUITAR TRANSMITTER IN DOCKING PORT
The Katana Air EX comes with a Wi-Fi guitar transmitter providing up to 12 hours of play time in between charges and nearly zero latency.

2 AMP TYPE VOICE SELECTOR
The Katana Air EX's five amp voices range from clean to lead, including a dedicated acoustic/bass model and the fantastic Waza Craft 'Brown' sound.

3 EFFECTS CONTROL KNOBS
There are over 60 effects to choose from, with deep editing via the Tone Studio mobile app and an optional wireless footswitch and expression pedal.

BOSS KATANA AIR EX £544

More Air, vicar? Boss pump up their popular wireless desktop amp

Ever since its introduction, the Boss Katana range has become a byword for affordable digital modelling, with a wide range of amps covering home, studio and stage use. In the home amp market, small is often beautiful, and the Katana Air stereo desktop amp is a popular choice, pushing out up to 30 watts through a pair of three-inch speakers, with a wireless guitar transmitter and battery power to remove untidy wires and cables. Now Boss have added yet another option to the range, for those who like the wireless thing but want more: the Katana Air EX.

> "A DESKTOP AMP THAT CROSSES OVER INTO SERIOUS RECORDING"

The Katana Air EX is physically bigger than the original Air, with a ported wood cabinet housing a pair of specially-designed five-inch loudspeakers. With a tough textured black finish, recessed control panel and silver accents to the speaker grille, the Air EX has more of a professional amp look and feel. As well as regular jack sockets for guitar and headphones, there's a docking port and charger for the Katana Air EX's wireless transmitter, which provides up to 12 hours of play time. On the rear panel, there's a useful pair of stereo line out jacks, together with an aux in and a USB type 'B' port, direct recording into your computer. Bluetooth provides audio streaming and remote control from the Boss Tone Studio mobile app, enhanced by an optional wireless footswitch and expression pedal. Like its smaller brother, the Katana Air EX can run off mains power or batteries, with an optional rechargeable power pack giving up to 16 hours of cable-free use.

In use, the bigger loudspeakers and stereo sound make the Katana Air EX satisfying to play and record, with practically zero latency from the wireless transmitter. The five amp voices aren't modelled on specific designs but include superb clean, crunch and lead tones together with a dedicated voice for bass and acoustic instruments. There's also the wonderful 'Brown' custom lead sound from Boss' acclaimed Waza Craft head, which sounds terrific when teamed with a brawny humbucker. You can take your pick from over 60 assorted boosts, overdrives, delays and modulations and store your favourite patches in six on-board memory slots. The stereo line-outs mean the Air EX isn't restricted to home use – you can easily plug it into a console and use it on any size of stage, with enough power from the larger speakers to handle rehearsals and maller un-mic'd gigs, with wireless freedom removing the distracting tangle of leads that can be pulled out or tripped over.

If you're looking for a desktop amp that crosses over into serious recording, rehearsals and more, the Katana Air EX is an ideal choice.
Nick Guppy

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
USABILITY	★★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Digital modelling 2x5" stereo combo

CHANNELS: Five amp voices and six on-board memory slots

OUTPUT: 35 watts RMS on mains power, reducing to 20 watts on batteries

CONTROLS: Amp type, gain, volume, bass, middle, treble, effects select x2, reverb level, master volume, Bluetooth pairing, power, patch store/select.

SOCKETS: Guitar in, headphones out, transmitter dock/charge. Stereo line out, USB Type B port for direct recording to computer/DAW

LOUDSPEAKERS: Two 5" special design

WEIGHT: 5.6kg

DIMENSIONS: [HxWxD] 236 x 414 x 192mm

OPTIONS: The EV-1WL wireless expression pedal retails for £163, while the FS-1WL wireless footswitch is £112. As an alternative to AA batteries, the rechargeable BTY-NIMH/A power pack gives up to 16 hours of playtime and sells for £108.

CONTACT: boss.info/uk

Photography Olly Curtis

ELECTRO-HARMONIX PICO POG £199

Pico Blinder

You should be familiar with the Electro-Harmonix POG – it's the Polyphonic Octave Generator that set the standard for multi-string, multi-octave layering and has graced the pedalboards of legends ranging from Jack White to Joe Satriani. Now, EHX has shrunk the POG down to its smallest form to date (92 x 50 x 50mm) in the Pico POG. If you haven't come across it before, in a nutshell the POG gives you an octave below your guitar's pitch, as well as an octave above. It can do this simultaneously, while also blending in the sound of your original pitch, giving you three octaves to play with. But as well as this it can track all six of your strings at once.

So, naturally, this lends the Pico POG to many different applications, from faux bass guitar, to simulated 12- or, technically, 18-string sounds. There's a level control for each of the three signals, and EHX has equipped this version with a multi-function Filter switch, which changes the functionality of the Tone control. In regular 'tone' mode, it functions as you'd expect with a flat response in the middle, and a cut to the bass while boosting the high end as you turn it clockwise, with the opposite once you turn it anti-clockwise. Then there's a low-pass filter, which cuts the high end for the effected signals, and a high-pass mode which cuts the low end of the same signals.

Now, there's a lot of tonal experimentation to be had from the Pico POG. Everything from synthy stacked lines to organ-style tones are easily and quickly achievable. Pair it up with some OD and fuzz and you're into Josh Homme/Jack White territory. There are Jimi-style octave-up tones to be had, and some convincing Byrds-y 12-string sounds, particularly when you start playing with the filter. But the main concern we had before plugging in was whether EHX could pack the POG DNA into such a small format. The answer is yes, pretty much. It tracks very well, and there's plenty of control to hand, and while it omits the split outputs of some of the other POG versions, we think it delivers the key sounds.

Price-wise, there's not a lot of difference between the Pico, Micro and Nano versions of the POG, so if you only want it for a few songs, or you want to have more than one, you'll be able to do it without dedicating loads of pedalboard space.

Stuart Williams

> "THERE'S A LOT OF TONAL EXPERIMENTATION TO BE HAD"

AT A GLANCE

TYPE: Polyphonic Octave Generator

CONTROLS: Sub octave, octave up, dry, tone, filter mode switch

SOCKETS: Input, output, power

POWER: 9v PSU (included)

CONTACT: Electro-Harmonix www.ehx.com

SUMMARY	
FEATURES	★★★★½
PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★½
BUILD QUALITY	★★★★½
USABILITY	★★★★½
OVERALL	★★★★½

Photo Phil Barker

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Words Amit Sharma

DIRTY SOUND MAGNET

Swiss psychedelic trio Dirty Sound Magnet have created a unique racket that's both thrillingly expansive and potently evocative. On their fourth album *Dreaming In Dystopia*, they combine the sonic directness of Jimi Hendrix and The Doors with the leftfield innovation typified by Frank Zappa.

"I know it sounds old-fashioned but creative liberty in the '60s and '70s made music so rich and powerful," says guitarist/singer Stavros Dzodzos. "We try to keep our music organic, and that's why people might call it 'vintage'. We're not trying to create a big wall of noise with loads of compression and processing. It's a matter of taste."

For the new recordings, Stavros plugged his Gibson Les Paul Standard and Fender Telecaster into a Tone King Sky King combo to create base tones that he describes as warm and characterful. But it's the wobbly and warbling modulation pedals in between that stand out for colouring much of his work on the album, notably on tracks like *Lonely Bird* and *Insomnia*.

"One pedal that really defined the sound of this record is my Boss VB-2W vibrato," he says. "I started using it on one song and then ended up using it everywhere! For the solo in *Insomnia* I was lucky enough to get my hands on an original Mu-Tron Bi-Phase, which is the effect Zappa used on a lot his records. As well as my hand-wired Tube Screamer and Way Huge Supa-Puss delay, another really important pedal was the Electro-Harmonix Freeze – it allows me to create layers and texture that fill space, which is important for a power trio."

It's the kind of analogue rig that provides plenty of options for psychedelic noises without taking up too much space. But given how technology is advancing, would he ever be tempted to switch over to a digital set-up?

"We prefer more natural sounds," he says, "but I never have boundaries regarding the gear I use. The equipment we have is simply a set of tools to express our artistic vision. My rule is simply to follow my ears."

Debbie Gough of Heriot plays the American Series Virtuoso in Mystic Blue

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